

On High Hills
Memories of the Alps



Geoffrey W. Young

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MEMORIES OF THE ALPS

BY
GEOFFREY WINTHROP YOUNG

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FREEDOM, APRIL AND RAIN.

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WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

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There is much comfort in high hills,
and a great easing of the heart.
We look upon them, and our nature fills
with loftier images from their life apart.
They set our feet on curves of freedom bent
to snap the circles of our discontent.

TO
ALL MOUNTAINEERS
WHO WENT BEFORE US :
AND WITH US :
AND WHO SHALL COME AFTER US

FOREWORD

UN**TIL** men are found to say, and say with seriousness, what they pluck from danger and discomfort, to say, and say in full, what they have found of beauty and delight, we shall not have an account of a climb which those who have shared the experience will acknowledge to be no more and no less than the truth, and those who have not will accept as a worthy vindication of our creed."¹ The paper from which this sentence is taken has often been quoted. It set us a very high standard, but one which no genuine writer about mountains has since been able to ignore. I shall not need to be told how far these stories fall short of it—"If we offend, it is with our good will: That you should think we come not to offend." For in a day of mountain climbing there are three strands twisted upon one another to make up a single length of experience, the things we are doing, the things we are seeing, and the things we are feeling. Although only one of the three will be uppermost in our mind at any moment, we ourselves remain always conscious of the other two: they form equally a part of the adventure as we live through it. But in the telling afterwards the three cannot be recalled simultaneously. We may always seem to have been occupied unduly with the view at one time, with our climbing at another, and with what we were feeling and thinking at yet a third. With all our good will, our veracity as chroniclers must depend for two strands of the story upon a listener's or a reader's imagination.

The ascents described are taken from most of the seasons during which I was climbing big mountains—for never more than a few weeks each year, and not in every year. Apart from a preliminary chapter, I have limited them to my climbs in the Alps, so as to give them at least a unity of place. But they are not a continuous record; and I could not read them myself continuously. They belong to moods and phases sometimes different, too often the same; and they are intended, at best, to be dipped into as an occasional fireside distraction.

¹ Charles Donald Robertson on *Alpine Humour* in 'The Englishman in the Alps.'

I am grateful to the editor and proprietors for permission to include several stories first published in the Cornhill Magazine; to Colonel John Buchan for the same permission in the case of the ascent of Mont Blanc, which appeared in his 'Great Hours in Sport'; and to the editors of the Alpine and other mountain journals for leave to make use again of the material of some other chapters. With one or two exceptions the stories already in print have been wholly or in part rewritten, and, possibly, made more intelligible. In particular, detail which had only a technical or temporary significance has been omitted.

I hope that I shall nowhere be found to have said "Do as we did," or even "Don't do as we did"; but, somewhere or everywhere, "Go and do something." My thought in writing has been more with those who are interested in mountains, and in our reasons for mountaineering, and who may be brought to care for one or both, than with the converted who climb, and who know already as much about them as I do, and in many cases more.

G. W. Y.

CAMBRIDGE, 1926.

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ON HIGH HILLS

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CHAPTER I

HILLS AND A BOY

There is always something strange
happening just round the corner, when no one is by,
at the bend where the breakers and the rocks and the sky
put their noses together,
and whisper how they wish they could play without the weather !

BESIDE the lane up which we used to pass every day as children stood a school, with a belfry. The belfry was glazed with small panes of amethyst-coloured glass. Into and out of this floating sky-palace the folk of Fairyland flitted and sang. It was the playground for all the realities of a child's dream world. When I walk under it now, I see a vane and a box of pink glass, with some darker ruby panes, ill-matched but not unpleasing : they seem to blush for their past frailty, for the brittle charms that tempted and fell before the mischievous gravel from the boys' yard. The fairies, with the light just catching the underside of their wings as they hovered across the pink sills, are all gone. But I can never pass the belfry without a catch of the breath, an involuntary hushing of the step. Something has all but happened, or is all but going to happen when I have passed. The fairies are waiting, only anxious to be again discovered ; it is I who have moved off a little, and can no longer quite see them.

Mountains may have something of the same message, even for our later life. At night, especially, they seem to be waiting breathlessly, full of a rushing silence of unseen presences and of a wondering curiosity as to whether we shall hear or see ' this time.' At moments when we are alone or when we have in imagination ' put out a little from the land,' we can almost *feel* their secret. But with the effort to shape it into words its meaning escapes us, like the music we have heard in dreams ; or it becomes commonplace, like a drying sea-pebble from which the beauty passes with the shadow of its moisture.

But the colour and the sound which flashed and rang round the hill walks of boyhood stay with us as actual and enduring memories. The imagination of childhood does not analyse: it absorbs impressions in their entirety; and so, they last. Our maturer thought can accept no later inspiration without the microscope and the dissecting knife; and the poor thing dried, classified, and planted out in some neat plot of memory, recovers no vigorous life, and soon fades. To all of us, probably, our lively and childish memories return differently, and they are differently accentuated according to the order in which our own consciousness developed. To some minds they recall a progress in reflective thought, often seen through a sober mist of puzzlement and conflicting discovery. To some they are simply a joyous atmosphere, of mere delight in being alive, overcharged and opaque with copious detail. To others they return chiefly as sound: voices and remembered stories. To others, again, they bring back a procession of inconsequent pictures, preserved, seemingly, for their colour and vivacity: a colour borrowed as much from the emotion they created at the moment as from any actual setting of the scene.

For myself the child series of scenes memorable clustered first about threatening sound: the inarticulate muttering of nurses, the hoarse vowel-shouting of the criers of evening papers in old London streets, emerging from the full roar, approaching with a personal and secret threat, and receding again into nightmare under the night-nursery window. Then it became woven into a tapestry of gorgeous pictures, of horses and donkeys, of the barbaric detail of the High Priest's robes, of Lady Abracadabra whisking through the keyhole in orange satin and black velvet, of the midnight dancing of the Flowers round the Yellow Lily reclined on the couch, and, above all, of the incidents in the interminable life of an imaginary Sugar Prince. But the pattern on the tapestry changed, at first imperceptibly, from the day I first saw hills. Thenceforward I see hills standing in the background, and it would seem to be often only for its background that a meaningless little scene is immortalized.

It was not the *beauty* of hills which exaggerated for me their importance: that came far later. Only prodigious children see beauty in a composite 'view.' Startling single colours impress a child; very rarely form; never, honestly said, the relations of lines or of lines to colours, although the propriety of a child will echo its elders' enthusiasm self-deceivingly and often almost convincingly. It was the *fact* of hills, their provoking mystery,

and the excitement of their wilfulness in trying to go up where everything else was content to lie along. They had no particular individuality of their own; they were just a pleasantly rebellious something, which took fields and walls and woods and farm-houses, and swung them up into easy sight and contradiction, in a conspiracy with myself to simplify things and to defy the tremendous levelling oppression of order and rules and 'do's' and 'don'ts.' Only very gradually, as the eye began to see lines and details in their relation to a general form, did hills take on personalities; and become, what they have remained, each an independent kingdom, possessing everything that covers it and every foot that is set upon it, and bearing all its burdens alike aloft into a freer world, of kindlier rule.

It must have been in South Wales, where my father took us for our first walking tour. Not a line of the novel thrill of preparation, or of the impatient journey, was graven deep enough to survive. But, suddenly, vivid as this morning in feel and colour, spreads round me a still, green water-meadow, heavy and dew-globed in the glare of sunlight, and humming with summer heat. On the right I have the impression of a forest hill of creepers, still without shape for the incurious acceptance of a child's senses. The feeling of a trickle of coolness round my bare knees is not from any wind, nor from the long sappy grass starred with great flowers on high stalks, but can only be a remembered suggestion from the cooler sound of the stream, spraying over mossy rocks and down through the winding meadow trees. The colours of the flowers are reflected up on to immense butterflies, blurs of purple and gold, of tortoise-shell and ivory-blue, that drift drowsily and countless down the sunshine, to settle on our grey, soft-brimmed hats or brush against our cheeks with the velvet persistence of moths of sleep.

From the first day of freedom the moments of meals are deeply etched upon the mind, not only by the edge of a sharper appetite, but because they are lively with the attraction of a revolt from the oldest established routine of a short life. Through all recollections of active living this exaggeration of the sensations felt during rests for food continues, for the reason, probably, that they are the only intervals in long days of change when the eye can turn inward, at leisure to review impressions. But for a child the materials, even the catastrophes, of a picnic are a lasting romance. We are tramping back along a stony lane, from somewhere to somewhere. It is decided that our pace is quite three miles an hour. "That means G. is walking four miles

an hour—for his height!" emends my brother. My father assents judicially; and I strut forward with an exultation that banishes fatigue. But the inspiration and the goal of that great effort, moving along parallel with us above a wavering skyline of hills, is the vision of two roast ducks, big and brown and crackly, projected on to a sky of green peas, and overshadowed by a huge transparent jar of rose-coloured raspberry jam stiff with tiny seeds.

Above the mists that have settled over most of this—or was it another?—season emerge the ponderous towers of two castles, Manorbier and Pembroke. They are blended together, because we stopped to sketch them both, at different times, in the grey linen pocket-book. And memory has improved upon the real sketch; for the (composite!) castle, with a black dot where the pencil broke, stands upon one fine-shaded hill: but into the border of the remembered picture projects, anomalously, the *coloured* outline of yet another hill, supporting the end of my father's beard, the brim of his forward-tilted hat, and the easy curve of long crossed legs, characteristically sharp-angled at the knees, as he lies under a thorn and is making the sketch.

I wonder now where it was, the Mystery Inn where I first smelt stuffy rooms? An illustrated comic sheet of the Claimant's case lay in the parlour. A woman, with hair so tight and shiny that it must have been made in one piece, only charged ten shillings for all the meals and lodging of the three of us! And above all, in the bottom drawer of the bedroom chest (left-hand corner), I found a white, magic, china jug, full to the brim of great, bright, silver crowns and half-crowns!

Between two shadow lines of hills, which sped us out and drew us in, we crossed an arm of the open sea in an open boat of fishy smells. A blue, wrinkled fisherman worked the odd sculls in surprising fashion, not at all after the rigorous code enforced by the elders of an oarsman family. The up and down of the crossing comes back inevitably to the sound of a peal of bells, because of the falling ring of unforgettable names, names which must have belonged to the villages of our departure and of our arrival under the opposing lines of hills, 'Angle to Dale, Angle to Dale!'

Strange folk were blown into and out of our ken from unimagined under-worlds. There was the Wicked Young Man, who came on to the coach in some valley of birches, straight out of a forbidden story-book. He had thick yellow curls and a flashy pink face, with kid gloves and a bangle. He swore spongily and fascinatingly, and the fact that his bulbous gold watch-

chain was fixed with a watch-guard through a *high* button of his green waistcoat stamped him as simply Satanic!

A still more iridescent figure was the Vulgar Old Woman in Black, whose crimes were afterwards coldly and finally dismissed by the authorities—into that flaming eternity which invariably enshrines unmentionable memories!—with the single syllable ‘Gin!’ She shrilled opposite us in a crowded char-à-banc, and shrieked volubly up to an improper domestic anecdote. With a raconteur’s vanity she even began to repeat it, when—“Thank you! That is *quite* enough!” in the icy tone that sent hot flushes up your spine, cut her off like a withered leaf from beside me; and the rest of the drive has faded out of mind under a cloud of awful silence. But I think we must that day have been coaching to St. Davids, for, in the absence of a hill background, ‘her’ flabby black outline is joggling in memory against the rose-grey columns of the cathedral; and her black curves and the Gothic arches of the cathedral are alike permanently confused with the bent black silhouette and cut marble profile of the immensely venerable Dean who, afterwards, I must suppose, showed us over his restorations.

Pwllheli must have come in somewhere; for the name suggests little rooms with red and white curtains nailed across the hermetic windows, and the hot irritation of a first night of fleas. Bardsea, beyond, we could not reach, because of a storm; and, therefore, its name is printed indelibly among the unrealized hopes. The isthmus of Gower has its own niche, because there the inhabitants were reported to live, remarkably, by taking in each other’s washing.

With the beginnings of our attempts upon the mountains themselves, rain, always rain, mist, torrents, wet grey rocks and rain-beaded hummock-grass, fill all the foreground of the pictures. As gorges, as slopes, as bluffs, seen and remembered in a single glance, sections of the hills survive; but only very rarely a larger outline of a mountain, as it might frown vaguely and from a heart-sinking distance upon a wet morning start. Priscilly Top, enchanted name! was my first summit; and I went up it hard, in my brother’s opinion ‘humping like a camel’! We invariably carried a metallic blue tin of red-grained tongue or of yellow-marbled corn-beef; a brown-papered tin of gritty biscuits, whose flavour agreed with nothing else; and a thin bottle of raspberry vinegar, to mix with the peaty or cold-stone splutter of the hill streams. These formed the groundwork of our touring ritual. Each morsel of jellied gravy had all the authority

of a Thirty-ninth Article. A whole gallery of vivid scenes stretches away among the shadows of confused hills, pictures of us three, crouching damply upon rocks and moss-hags by sombre streams and biting the rain into our portions, dealt out evenly upon the leaky ashen biscuits. Only when we are young, and sit out upon a wet stone on a hillside in a wind, is it an entrancing surprise to discover, suddenly and for the first time, that our clothes are not really ourselves; that they may meet us at points, coldly and strangely, with no understanding even for the glow of excitement and effort which kindles through all our less apparent frame. A dangerous and delightful heresy one year was the presence of pale green pistachio nuts among the meat in the tins. But even they, after all, conformed with tradition; for they were found neither to add to nor detract from the conservative taste. Their tint, and surprising mildness, have ever since surrounded their display in shop windows with a halo of unfulfilled mystery.

At the first thought, it seems singular that the recurring shiver and rapture of our bathes—always marked on the map with a red dot, whereas the walks were lined in blue—have not survived as actual memories, but only indirectly, as they were discussed or planned in fragments of remembered chatter. Not until sunlight and the wide glitter of surf and pebble and sand begin to illuminate them, as they did in later walks on the Welsh coast and in the Channel Islands, does each bathe leap back to mind definite in detail and sensation. Then even their place-names are graven in italics: Rosille Bay, long golden sands strewn with razor-shells, and Bullslaughter Bay, with appropriately bluff and butcherly cliffs marked by the guide-book as 'unscaleable,' and therefore a glorious frame for the bathe. The age when the open-air dip is sought for and remembered as the event of the day belongs to a later period of growing strength, when the feel of the limbs, their movement and their desire for sun-warmth, for wind and for the bracing shock of water, have become conscious. For the child, his body is still just only himself, and shares his shyness and his conventions. His delight in the prospect of the wild bathe is generally only imitative. At the back of his mind there is probably a timid preference for the bathing-machine, conventional costume, and the warm paddle-sands. For most of us, to have learned to swim marks the beginning of conscious pleasure. Before then, water, following its own wild will in its own wild places, is if anything hostile, and mind and body instinctively form a league

against it. After then, all waters belong to the limbs ; and these have their own fashion of enjoying their mastery : one which the mind, released from care, follows indulgently, itself free to record detachedly, and to remember, their happy sensations. That first lesson in swimming ! It was in an abandoned Irish quarry of great cliffs, where the water alone was said to be sixty feet deep. We drove posts into the rock walls, nailed a door across them as a platform, and plunged fearfully in. I went down, infinitely down, for long hours ; and for long hours I watched, miles above my head, the dark green corkscrews of the eddies I had created tapering down from the yellowy-green obscurity near the surface, and the wavering silver globules of breath wandering casually upward towards them, as if uncertain of the way. From that day I do not think I forgot any bathe.

Our first big mountain was Arenig Fach, above Bala, where it rains. We avoided the steep grass gully over the lake, and laboured round by the western shoulder, in dense mist, and almost to the summit. The challenge of that gully remained in mind ; and ten years later, on the first tour taken under the new inspiration, I came back to it directly and firstly, and zigzagged up it triumphantly.

Aran Ben Llynn was a more serious undertaking. In a driving cloud of thin prickly rain we toiled up at least fifteen successive false skylines, hoping that each might be the summit. My brother's ingenious pencil recalls our dim-seen figures, the smallest ahead, and their monotonous antiphone :—First Misty Form : " Another ridge, I think ! " Second ditto : " Oh ! " Third ditto : " Ah ! "

Our ascent of Cader Idris, in mist and blunt hail, earned us one of my father's terse and treasured praises, notably for " sticking to it quietly ! " Had not sixteen members of that fabulous body, the Alpine Club, circled round the little tarn under like conditions, and sought the Fox's Path in vain ? On the descent we tried down a grassy chimney, and had to return. This elicited for us the second golden rule for walkers : " Never go on down where you have had to drop two or three times, close together, from your hands to your feet ! " The first rule had been delivered on Arenig : " Never spring or stride uphill ! " And what a ' guide's pace ' was we learned at the same time. It is prophetic of memory to have retained of all the varied talk of those early tours only those remarks that had to do with the arts of walking and way-finding. Knee-deep in the lower lake stood a

lonely angler, with mist about him and wearing high waders ; and I remember him, because I can still feel the chill which I knew he must be feeling round his legs !

The fog closes round ; and we are in a miniature railway on the way up to Festiniog. This, unforgettably, ' winds along the top of the walls,' while the guard ' lights his pipe at the engine fires,' and the engine-driver will stop by request ' to let you pick flowers.' At Festiniog the landlord has become confused with my first, red-faced, oily-grey-haired day-schoolmaster ; and there was a marvellous book, about children who all climbed out on to a roof. But I had to leave the adventure and the book unfinished ; and I could never find the right inn, or the book, in later years.

From the top of Cynicht, on the following day, we had our first wide mountain view, and counted ' nineteen lakes ! ' And then we are at Pen-y-Gwryd, and memory is suddenly wide awake. There is a startling view of the three Snowdon summits, discovered at the end of a plodgy tramp up Moel Siabod. It was near sunset, and they looked like the gold-lacquered pyramids on a Japanese tea-tray. Again, of my father, leaning in grey tweeds against one of the four wind-bent trees opposite the inn, and delivering judgment between an angry, black-eyed Mrs. Owen in a mob cap, and a talkative cyclist, as to whether 2s. 6d. is, or is not, an illegal price for a bread-and-cheese lunch. (" Of course the fellow should have thought, before he appealed to me, that we haven't paid our own bill yet ! ") The mild, black-bearded frequenter, known as ' The Welsh Shepherd,' is perpetually repeating to each new-comer a story of how, on his first visit, Charles Kingsley and Tom Hughes both put their heads out of the bar window, and called him in, saying, " We all sit in the bar parlour at Pen-y-Gwryd." As great names had no value for themselves in those days—and that of Tom Hughes suffered further from the familiarity that obscures a godfather—the search for the humorous point which must, of course, be hidden in this anecdote beguiled a pair of short legs over many miles of rough hillside. The identification of the exact scree-slope on the Glydyrs down which the poet in ' Two Years Ago ' careered was less intriguing ; for poets were people with long black ringlets, and if these got as soppy in the mists as my own damp crop, the consequent oily drip and splash on to the scraggly stones was displeasing to think of.

One evening there was a solemn debate in the dusk of the drizzling garden, as to whether I should be content to put off

for this year going up Snowdon. It is recollected with all the ceremonial detail of a splendid renunciation, mournful, but gratifying for its very dignity. It was to be my first independent decision, the first admission that I had a discretion, stronger and of more importance it appeared in the world's opinion than my legs!

So it must have been in a later year—the summer probably, when recollection begins with being knocked flat by a wave at Llanfairfechan, continues merely as the feeling of dry hot wind over Y Foel Frâs and the Carnedds, and breaks off for the time abruptly in the cold of a morning dip in Llynn Curig—that we sat again in the Pen-y-Gwryd bar parlour shiny with brass and firelight, after the ascent of Snowdon, the first of thirteen times that I reached that summit without seeing any view! Opposite sat Frederick Morshead, once 'swiftest of foot of all the Alpine brotherhood'; and we heard his son recount how they had been wandering that day under the then unconquered precipices of Lliwedd, and how he had only just restrained his father, (who smiled the while consciously in his beard), from attacking the slabs. This led to another story of *my* father on the Glydyrs, in the 'fifties or 'sixties, with a large party in a thick fog; and of how he had ended a dispute as to which side of the range they ought to return down by asking: "Did you notice upon which cheek you felt the wind as we came up? No? Well, I did! So we go down here!" Every now and then old Mrs. Owen, in her mob cap with the flying muslin streamers, would jump up from her low chair, and chase the sheep-dogs furiously out from under our chairs, with a poker and a shrill 'Al-la-a-n!' (Get out?).

We climbed all the Glydyrs that second tour; and came back from one down an ankle-breaking cwm, which I have since often looked at, and left alone to its shadows and wicked memories. On the gallant top of Tryfan we saw two men emerge from the cliffs, roped together, the first sight of the rope! I believe this was in truth the occasion of the first ascent of the North Gully of Tryfan, and the beginning of modern rock climbing in Wales. On to Snowdon we circled over the falling wave-crest of Lliwedd: most glorious of ridge walks, along which I have so often since raced the open sunset, after long enclosed hours of chilly shadow upon a Lliwedd rock climb. If ever we make that walk alone, the rocky hummocks of the ghostly Bwlch-y-Saethau are ready to echo again with the clamour of Arthur's last great battle, fought on horseback over this ill-chosen chaos;

and Arthur himself, we remember, is waiting, asleep, in the cavern of the Slanting Gully round the cliff corner. At an incautious tread on the big slab he may stir, and his shield shift with a clang ; or a long column of knights with lances may ride out on a wisp of grey cloud across the dark face of Llyn Llydau deep below, to fade into mist-pennons over mid-water, disappointed of their hour of awakening. Across the bwlch the summit-cone of Y Wyddfa stands against the sunset. In winter, cairn and sky-crag are plumed with white feathers and fern-leaves of ice. The level rays pour through the ice-fronds from behind, melting all harder outlines into golden haze. And under this burning halo the mass of lower mountain shadows borrows a seeming of transparency and lightness, as if the whole peak were changing into evening cloud, and drifting out towards the sea.

Upon the vision of Snowdon childhood ended. The curtain of the school stage rushed down, and for noisy interminable years shut off the glimpses into natural sunny living. Behind the curtain, under limelight, the artificial little drama played itself out, conventional, immature, passionate and self-satisfied. At the end we boy-players walked out, much as we had entered ; familiar with all the tricks of the comedy and of our company ; but of the real world and of its beauty, or of ourselves and of what lay within us, knowing nothing, and robbed of much of the freshness of spirit that had once desired to know.

Chinks in the curtain at first there must have been. For one of the few pictures left from early school-days presents a very small boy crouched on a form in the big school-room, that always smelt of wet soap, poring over the tragedy of the Matterhorn in a torn volume of the ' Boy's Own Paper '—even the smudgy illustrations are still distinct. And another opened for a moment on the day of the passage from the private to the public school. " Well, do you think you can pass the next four years of your life happily here ? " We were sitting at the time on an ivy-covered stump, above an open hillside, and looking down at the great school buildings : from which I shrank physically, but which were to prove so indulgent to the body and its prowess, so much more of a prison for the mind. The words sounded to me almost ironical ; and as I looked round at the freedom of the Downs, for a second I think I saw them almost as they are to me now. For, when once he is absorbed into the school atmosphere, no boy can again see his school environment naturally, with the unprejudiced eyes of ' home.' He puts on school spectacles ; and he is fated ever afterwards to see and

to recall school denizens and school scenery as images slightly distorted, not quite human, faintly grotesque.

It was not long afterwards, but clearly long enough for the chink to have closed again, that a much older boy took me for a walk over the grassy chalk ridges. Pausing on a slope of stunted trees and scattered flints, he remarked sententiously: "Now, lots of people call this country beautiful. What is your honest opinion?" His dignity demanded that I should not echo some 'grown-up' formula. 'Honestly' the word beauty meant nothing to me as applied to a view. I knew I liked certain vivid colours, singly or in contrast—I had discovered that as a child in the Isle of Wight, watching the sunsets on the sea in 'Kra-katoa' year. But the brown slopes showed none of these; and besides the view was all 'school-coloured.' Nor, though I looked anxiously, did the venerable backs of the Downs stiffen up, anywhere in sight; into the squared shoulders and upflung head of an exciting mountain revolt against the smooth orderliness of the earth's level habit. I felt that too; but I could certainly never have framed it as a thought, much less have put it into words. So I only answered, with conviction, that I thought it a very dull sort of country indeed.

The chink had closed; but, once or twice, I like to think that the spectacles almost fell off. It seemed natural that my mother should have the art of conjuring horses and unlikely drives even out of the depressing purlieus of a school. The hirelings she inspirited to romantic courses, across the most surprising ground. Her visits never seemed to be made to us *at school*; they were hours upon a Magic Carpet, that fled with us out of its atmosphere. I first discovered the enchantment in twisted roots and the colours on bracken as I watched them snap away from under the wheel upon green forest turf. Brown-gold of autumn bracken on hill-sides brings back with it still the sound of leather harness straining, the soft thud of hoofs and the creak of springing shafts: exciting, muffled noises that are lost in the rattle of a road drive. A favourite escape ran up along the crest of a grassy ridge, and out on to the edge of a green amphitheatre carved abruptly back into the face of the Downs, above the vale. Loyally I accepted this as a place of wonder: more actually I thought it would make a fine toboggan shoot; and the somersaults that must occur where the slides would be bumping down over the grassy steps, or lanchards, cheered many an effort at serious contemplation.

The book of memories of the Wiltshire Downs is full of later

and beautiful pictures: of the primitive angularity of belts of woodland crossing the old, smooth grass of the denes; of the tired mounds of barrow and camp settling back from sheer age into the skyline; of pallid sunbreaks, creeping bat-winged up the rounded green headlands. But these early hours on Martinsell have slipped into the later folio with the others; and I like them best. They retain no impression of the view; the vale is a blank, the swirling edge of the Down is something uneven in the foreground, supporting the shadow of a restless pony shifting feet on the very rim of the grass cliff. If, then, it was not to be found in the forgotten view, what was it that invested these moments with the quality of wonder necessary for the preservation of all earlier memories? Perhaps it was the figure erect in the trap and stamped dark against the sky, with lion-gold eyes under silvering hair looking away and out across the vale. To a child there is no deeper mystery than the absorption of someone it loves in something it has not yet learned to understand.

In Sixth Form, at a public school, the fortunate are sometimes left enough to themselves to begin again to grow an idea or to discover an interest. In Sixth Form Library, for me, the school curtains suddenly dragged apart. I came one day upon Whymper's 'Scrambles.' With the first reading (of many—for I knew it in the end almost by heart) the horizon shifted. Peaks and skies and great spaces of adventure rolled upward and outward, smashing the walls of a small, eager, self-centred world. I wonder how many boys have owed the same debt to that great boy's book. Snows and glaciers began to 'haunt me like a passion'; the delight in the thought of them always tempered by a little ache of unsatisfied longing. A shifting halo, like the ghost of the solid rainbows that once lighted fairyland for the child, played round any picture or story of hills, even round the words 'mountain' or 'Alp.' A corresponding shadow of envy threw into relief any name or record that could claim an acquaintance with mountains closer than my own. I envied my own childhood, so unconscious of all that had lain hidden near at hand in our early hill walks. As the light intensified with the reading of mountain books I began to live in two worlds. From a dull lesson I could escape at will, to revel in the pleasanter problems of some imaginary and enormous ascent. The flash of blue-white ice and of red rocks followed me even on to the football field and to the bathing-place, and only left me in the rush of exciting movement. In our school hymn-books

we, of the choir at least, were accustomed to scribble the date over the hymn of the day and add the record of any great event, such as our appearance in a school match or the winning of a school prize. It is curious now to read among these scrawls the first assertions of a new personality, less arrogant or, at all events, less priggish: "Shall I ever go to the Alps?" and "If I could only be a mountaineer!"

Something of the romance, of the recovered rainbow light which filled every corner of that alternative world, has faded with familiarity and with the increasing interest in the technicalities of climbing. In fact, I do not think that it ever shone among the mountains themselves with the brilliance with which it coloured those later school-days of hope and anticipation. The ache of unsatisfied longing survived perhaps more keenly, and is even now not incapable of challenging its only subduer, the philosophic temper of middle life. But the still, steady flame of aspiration, to which all the emotions kindled by the world of hills real or imaginary contributed, the almost passionate belief that the mountains hold for many of us some ideal which it is even better that they should continue to hold up before us unattained, has never flickered.

But the Alps are not for schoolboys; and the fine tradition of my father's generation, that of the early Alpine explorers, made a walking tour seem in those simpler days a no less dignified and romantic outlet. To South Cornwall I went with my brother. A week of blazing sunshine, with a haze of heat over cliffs and sea. The drooping golden heads of gorse along the borders of the Falmouth estuary seem still to be craning downward, across their tidal collar of parched grey rock, to dip in the blue glassy water. A boy on a dun pony rides down a grassy avenue, where we are trespassing under grey-lichened trees. We are asking our way in a climbing Cornish lane of heavy orchard blossoms and white thatched cottages; and here, suddenly, a gigantic pirate is projected out of a past century! Everything about that ancient was huge! His voice crashed round inside a cottage and roared out of all its doors and windows at once, like a scorching, overwhelming sand-storm. He rolled after it, sweeping its echoes from hedge to hedge up the hot and narrow green lane. Spyglass under arm he rolled, in a vast white-duck jumper, and still hitching up vaster white-duck breeches. His face, big as a mahogany dining-table, shook with his bellowings; dark and furrowed, between great gold hoops of ear-rings and under a grizzled fringe and the low-crowned shiny-black hat that goes

only with a pigtail. He thundered all the oaths of Treasure Island to an expectorating undergrowl like the boom of its night-mare surf. We fled, literally, and left him muttering his way—into another blank in memory.

The winding trail of small black wasps, on the moors above Hone, is explained to me as the foreign pupils of a Jesuit seminary. They remain clear; probably because it was mysterious to speculate what language they could be talking, and what they might be feeling under their smooth black soutanes, among those wild russets and purples of the moors. The church window, with Charles Kingsley's face in crude-coloured glass, has crept up into the picture behind them—a freakish juxtaposition!

Mevagissy, the musical name, and the songs of stalwart young fishermen in the street below, run through a haunted night of over-fatigue in the village inn. Beyond, the walk disappears in a land flowing with milk and honey; hot days among rivulets of milk-white china clay, that cut flat paths off the bluffs and out across the honey-yellow sand. Above the bluffs lay the tempting coolness of meretricious pools, glittering like the eyes of snakes, electric blue and blue-green turquoise. But the disappointment at the loss of all the bathes they seemed to offer, false as a mirage, was lessened by the discovery that they were only 'reservoirs'; and bathing in a reservoir, to a boy, is no better than wearing imitation rings or being put off at tea with rhubarb jam.

The old remembered hills of North Wales might surely look different in the light of this new understanding. The pilgrimage had to be made, and soon. A great friend, Christopher Wordsworth, and I designed a holiday walk, and with the fresh fascination of the safety bicycle to consider, we planned cunningly to journey from west to east, with the prevailing wind. We missed a train: and the tour became a prolonged thrust against wind and rain from east to west. The bicycles died out of use, and out of memory, on the first day. Arenig for revenge, the Arans for piety, Cader Idris for remembrance, followed in rapid order. Of a long day over Diphws, Llethr, and all the Rhinogs two instantaneous glimpses alone survive: an angle of grey sheep-wall on Llethr, visible for a few feet above stubby grass sprayed with wet diamond-dust, but lost above in a wind-hover of mist that ruckled and mourned through the chinks; and two dripping, sack-laden figures stumbling furiously out of a gorge, bent on covering the eight rough miles to the railway station in less than the hour that remained. There was still half a mile to go when we saw the puffy little train dawdling across

the flats by the sea. We caught it, I know; for I still feel under shoulder-blade and knapsack the warm ache, steamed in by hours of stiffening in a draughty carriage, which leaves an indelible wrinkle on the page of memory.

Moel Wynn, Cynicht, and Moel Siabod made another heavy day for young legs; and we were dry-throated and almost cross as we ground up the last marshy slopes of Siabod in a hot-red sundown. We used to pay overheed in those days to a superstition against drinking. The sight of the lonely dot of Pen-y-Gwryd far below happily absolved us: and there was water enough in the bogs of descent. The thirsts of those early untried feverish years! And the miracle of the deliciousness of cold hill water, never failing of its astonishing thrill! It was, of course, only in accordance with the history of uncomfortable humanity that the discovery of such a novel and inexpensive pleasure should at once be neutralized by the invention of a new virtue—in its renunciation! Without pride, with regret alone I now recall that voluntary martyrdom, and the obstinacy with which for several youthful years I persisted, even on the most burning snow pass, in rating the indulgence of a heartless self-control above the higher inspiration of a glinting mother-of-pearl shell, as it used to be proffered me, filled with a cool blend of lemon-juice and glacier water upon which transparent crystals of ice floated frostily.

So it happens that thirst remains as the connecting memory of walks among Irish hills; and particularly of a long and lonely crossing of the Reeks of Kerry. As children we had been familiar with our neighbours the Wicklow Mountains. Their inconstant complexion, changing almost hourly, and their mysterious shiftings—one day looming right over the garden and the next hardly visible on a remote horizon—had been our sure prophets of weather. But our expeditions upon them were always of the nature of picnics; and a picnic meant the conduct of an impromptu donkey tandem. No self-respecting Irish ass ever condescended to be guided by our reins; some of the party had always to run beside the leader directing progress with cowboy stock-whips. And between the exuberantly cracking thongs, the bumping over rocks up rutted hill-lanes and the rattling of chains and springless woodwork that might at any moment conceal the noise of a snapping shaft, any boy who spared more than a side-glance for the scenery ran unwarrantable risk!

Only upon a steep down-grade were the donkeys ever harmonious: they would bolt unanimously; and the leader, taking no

unfair advantage, would race neck and neck with his wheeler along any ditch or bank parallel to the lane. And yet I do not ever remember a picnic failing to reach its objective: whether that was the mountain farm at Balinascorney, famous for a brand of green and butter-oozing potato-cake, or a kettle fire of damp sticks on the hillside, among the inviting ruins of the Hell-fire Club.

However, we had once been taken for a week on our own feet round about Killarney. The jangling stream of beggars that then infested the Gap of Dunloe—picturesque enough had we thought so—survives only as a noise. In higher relief, probably because of its mystery, endures the legend that in the hidden House of Kenmare ‘every door-handle is made of a French enamel watch-back.’ Temporarily our fascinating animal world of tandems and donkey-polo and farmyard races had been shifted out of the foreground; and as a consequence the level Irish sunlight breaking out of the wooded crest of Torc, up which we scrambled, or glinting down over the lovely and laborious slopes of Purple Mountain, and the shadows scarring the bluffs of Eagle Crag—bluffs which could return echoes across the lake more musical, as is the nature of echoes, than the sounds they recalled—awoke some sympathetic impression.

So it was the thought of these hills which revived attractively as soon as the school walls fell flat and the time of mountain wandering began. Assuredly something of the secret which the mountains now seemed to promise must lie hidden behind that rampart of sunlight and those singing trumpet-echoes.

From London, early in this later phase, I journeyed direct to the Reeks. In the solitary night train a long and loud and tipsy Limerick drover banished useful sleep. But the village of Killarney, when I trudged out into it at dawn, still slept, and slept intimidatingly. In an English hamlet there is a look of busy sociability on the faces of the cottages along the main street. They crowd up together officiously and good-temperedly, open-eyed and silent. They remind one of children at an open-air school-feast, fidgeting along the sides of a straight table and trying to keep from grinning until Grace is said and the clatter can break loose. In an Irish village the houses are shy and casual. They have strolled up separately, to find themselves meeting, by chance, with reluctance. Mistrustfully from under their eaves, and sometimes askance or over their shoulder, they peer out at one another and at the irregular expanse of muddy roadway spreading forlornly through their dispersion.

With a young intruder's caution I muffled my bootnails in the muddy middle of the street, skirting clear of the staring windows. Softly as I tramped, sudden ominous rooks would keep flapping up metallicly against the yellowing of the horizon behind bare rusty branches, and cawing malignantly from the gables. I ground my teeth—noiselessly—at them for their betrayal, as I felt the window-panes beginning to shoot crooked yellow glances at me in their first reflections of the low dawn.

The long miles round the lake, blinded by jealous plantations, kept up the atmosphere of hostility ; and it was renewed at the foot of the Hags' Glen, where a lanky, whiskered cottager, who had been rewarded prematurely for his offer to guide me across the torrent, left me islanded upon a slippery rock in mid-rapid, and attempted to dash back past me. I am glad that a clutch at his unfriendly coat brought upon him the sousing that he had plotted for me. His was the only graceless nature that I ever met with in Irish wanderings.

As I clambered up the witch-like Glen, the wind hooted low and high through toothless gaps in the fangs of crag mumbling at the mists above my head. Higher again, the summit of Carran Thuoile was shrouded in a blankness of shifting vapour ; and behind and through this invisible Things stirred inquisitively. I confess to having bolted down the farther slopes ; and I emerged below into the half-light of day with some real sighs of pleasure, in large part the author's pleasure, a delighted wonder at having been chased so closely and so realistically by fears of my own creating ! Beyond, over the peat-bogs, ran an endless road, miles of contracting white ribbon. On a false skyline it might sway upward with a promise of kindly curves : only to cut brutally across the bleakness of some plateau bare of all secret or charm, and to hang down the farther incline like the tongue of a tired dog, protruding itself over yet another infinity of diminishing white ribbon. After a space of hours a solitary old man piped to me in the Kerry lilt that I had " eighteen miles to go, but ye'll never get there ! "—and he cheered me mightily. And twenty miles farther a solitary lass on a donkey echoed the lilt, " Ye have eighteen miles to go, and maybe ye won't get there ! "—and she made me almost despair. Once I passed a shepherd boy on a grassy hummock, only his rough head showing from among the tangle of his rough-haired sheep-dogs. He was wilder than they ; for the dogs at least were tempted into darting up suspiciously to share a fragment of egg sandwich. Once again I came over the edge of a hollow upon a rag-kilted,

gold-curled baby, with peat-brown toes and black sleeping lashes over violet eyes. She was dancing to herself alone upon a sagging marsh-bridge. Speech her fairy kin had forgotten to grant her; but after those weary wastes I was glad even of a seeming of human company. Only, at the outset I blundered. With what a pride of gesture she offered me back on tiptoe the moist remnant of my bar of chocolate, most royally reproachful! Yet it had been no bribe! The overture had been made without prejudice; and bore no relation, in my mind, to the thoughtless request for a kiss that followed! We parted, I fear, gravely, with the misunderstanding still dark between us: but perhaps she ate the rest afterwards?

For myself, food had long become impossible to swallow; and the half-bottle of railway claret, a mingling of Californian vine-bark with the buffet cistern, had been abandoned in the helter-skelter of escape from the nosing and padding Things in the mists on Carran Thuoile. The bogs offered no relief from thirst; for some wiseacre had warned me against the rivers of peat water, treacling with vitreous bubbles among pink-stained rocks; nor did any King of the Golden River meet me, to shake dewdrops from a lily into the empty flask. My feet plodded woodenly upon the hard military road, to the hundredth, and then the thousandth repeat of a refrain that thundered continually louder through my head—'in a barren and dry land, where no water is!' Motion became mechanical and stupefying: every dry joint creaked, and any halt as the day wore on foreshadowed a resumption too painful to contemplate.

Some time towards evening my mind woke up to a lucid interval. I became conscious of hot tea and buttered 'fadge' by the hearth of a mud-floored cottage, and of a flow of political talk from the old grandmother, brilliantly sustained, while her two large sons lounged on sentry duty outside the door. In their kindly minds such desolate tramping could have but one origin, a desire to evade the Police! Good manners forbade any direct allusion to a sympathetic situation, but the understanding and the tactful precautions were complete—"Ye can rest yer heart an' feet, child: the boys'll watch the road for ye!"

In better heart, after the interlude, the last of the sixty and more miles of hill and bog and barren road were trodden out to their end. For they did end at last, in darkness, by the sea; and amid the warm-hearted extravagance of a south Irish crowd, always ready to acclaim a sporting venture suitably—and notably

in this case by the enthusiastic breaking-open of the station premises to 'rescue' my bag.

Whereafter, in memory, the mountains again subsided. They become a background for dances on the sands with the fisher-folk to the music of a blind fiddler: for races between hybrid tandems, wherein each larger horse in the shafts was balanced by a smaller donkey in the lead, which, if the pace increased unduly, was twitched round by its traces and dragged tail-foremost, functioning thus as both brake and handicap; and for four-in-hand mule-scurries. Driven with reins of local lamp-wick, our mules frolicked with us sportingly and spaciously between brown hill-tops and grey meres, or skirted at a gallop along the sea-cliff edges, clinging by pace alone, as it seemed, to the heath-tufts that bushed far out over the leapings of the white Atlantic surf.

It was a relapse into 'undue preoccupation with the foreground.' The animistic preferences of a childhood, not yet remote, must be held responsible if among the memories of these passionate pilgrimages the alternative world, with its milder impressions of rambles on foot over Irish mountains, and of moonlit sails up the lakes between them, has wavered into indistinctness.

Yet one thing I was already beginning to realize; that whenever I walked alone among them I felt upon terms of closer intimacy with hills. It was not the feeling of romantic, half-jealous desire to possess which had thrown a glamour over my school readings of alpine adventure. It had become a current of thoroughly masculine sympathy between us, forcible, intermittent, and provokingly attractive. If any part of my attention were occupied with a human companion, with the consideration of an enjoyment other than my own, these mountains, I found, could assume an agreeable company expression, and were content to parade their heartiest conventions of formal charm and manner. If I approached them alone, although their complete intimacy continued tantalizingly to elude me, yet it was in very different fashion. They were compelled to give ground, to yield up something of their confidences, now here, now there, a golden apple of mystery. There were always further heights and depths beyond; but they had to leave me master of each new height I gained, any new depth of impression I borrowed from them. At moments it seemed certain that I should have captured their whole confidence round that cliff or over that summit, had not some distraction of steep rocks or some temptation of a new skyline been flung across my pursuit as an interruption to energy and purpose.

In the loneliness of a prolonged chase, as in courtship, a solitary pursuer and his pursued often establish a curious intimacy. It was not much as yet ; but I began to feel that it might mean more, both to mind and heart, than any enjoyment of the easy mountain favours which were displayed with so much mocking confidence when I came in the company of other mortals. I had not yet reached the point of expressly designing lonely tours : that would still have seemed a breach of social tradition ; and all the influences of a public-school training combined to represent solitariness as the forlorn fate of the outcast, and gregariousness as alike the foundation and the crown of ' success.' But if ever the social conscience had been appeased, if companionship were solidly in the background, although it might be defaulting by chance upon the day, then it did really seem as if solitude were exerting itself to console me, doubling vitality, deepening delight, and aggravating alike the emotional fervour of my chase and the ingenuity of the mountain obstacles that delayed it.

When we begin to notice how shy nature is of company we are beginning to know a little about the natural world to which we belong. In any world which belongs to civilized humanity, in a crowd of town or school, nature is moody if present at all, and she can behave as outrageously as Caliban. In the open air, if mortals seek her with their human cross-purposes still uppermost in mind, if they ' hunt her in couples,' she will appear to envelop them with superficial sympathy, but elude them all the while with the secret misleading of a Puck. Only to those who walk alone by wood or sea or hill does she appear as Ariel, a sprite and fitful still, but a sprite in their occasional service ; ready even at times to act as an interpreter of her own enchantments if the service they ask for is to be shown, behind the magic of form and colour, something of the principles of order and slower change that govern natural existences not made in man's image.

We have but to lie alone upon a cliff where we can watch below us the wasting of prodigal waves and above us the wings of motionless seagulls balancing exquisitely upon an uprush of wind, to listen upon a hillside to the under-scuffle of a stream or to the shrill and bubble of curlews over an invisible moorland, to tramp the fenlands where clouds assemble up the sky asserting their supremacy over the wide levels of earth, or, in turn, to ascend the valleys where earth makes answer in the uplifted summits that surpass the clouds—and in these places, at these times, if we are alone, we may become aware of personalities

in landscape and sound and motion as vivacious as our own but not humanly definable, and of new qualities of emotion manifested in them which burst through the poor wrappings of names which we give to them, anger or heartbreak or laughter, as through tatters of wet tissue-paper.

So much any 'pilgrim of the pointed stick' may discover soon after his setting out. To this point of necessary independence I had come, without intention and with but slight understanding; and chance rather than any conscious purpose helped me further along the way. I made my first visits to the Cumbrian fells upon 'reading parties.' An undergraduate reading party offers all the right conditions for the apprenticing of immature mountain lovers; it has the conventional groundwork of companionship, it selects infallibly the best natural scenery, it imposes no social obligations out of doors, and it leaves the nature of the 'reading' or study to the individual conscience.

Impatiently and economically as befitted the hurry of youth I used to travel north by night; and so my breathless expectation looked out first upon grey snow, or grass slopes smelling of rain, under a wintry or a summer dawn far up among the mountains. Ah, that first rough hug of the northern hills, where the arms of Shap Fell reached down in welcome about the line, and the eye, bored with the dull fleshiness of plains prostrate and flaccid under their litter of utility, can delight in the starting muscles and shapely bones of strong earth, stripped for a wrestle with the elements—or with the climber! The waking at sunrise in the Jura, with the first heralds of alpine air trumpeting sonorously through the lungs, is the only sensation I could compare with it; but in the Jura there are always the hot hours round the lake to follow, and by the time the real entry comes, at the Martigny elbow of the Rhone Valley where the Oberland and the Pennines close their ranks about us with a 'welcome home!' much of the spring of the day is already past.

The night journeys themselves were part of the fun. Their darkness and discomfort made a broad black border, framing and isolating the blaze of joy that came with the morning. Their 'upsettingness' served, too, to cover a similar change in myself, from an evening self laboriously constructed under a thousand pressures to do a hundred civilized tricks, to a spontaneous self that came of itself, with the winds and the height and the rapture of morning and movement. I was not introspective as a boy, but I must quickly have recognized that some sort of transition would take place; for I used to wait to change into moun-

tain clothes until I was on the neutral territory of the train, so that the pleasanter self which waited for me somewhere about the thousand-foot level might not return to life in inappropriate trousers, nor yet find itself in a climbing kit already tarnished by town smoke and by contact with the limbs of the less worthy twin.

On these Cumbrian flights my fellow-travellers were frequently seamen: alert, many-lived sailors, returning with parrots as presents for their wives or Pekin nightingales for their sweet-hearts, and merchant captains, with yarns for every one! As providing an intermediate atmosphere foreign to both my identities, no company could have served to mark the break between them more effectively. The little waiting-room at Penrith, where we changed and waited for daylight, wears still for me a startled look, and with good reason. There were three of them with me on that journey—a seaman with a monkey, a bluff skipper with a bullet head and thick grey curls, and a shrivelled, soft-voiced rival skipper, with shrewd eyes. They had capped yarns for all the long hours. Penrith platform was cloaked with ice and with bitter darkness, and the wind prickled with a dust of snow from the near fells; but a red fire roared in the grate. Within its semicircle of heat the stories grew tropically tall. Snakes were the theme, and in impossible competition they seemed to crawl up the fire-glow and coil all over the ceiling. The sailor subsided first, winked at me, and stole out with his monkey, for air. At that the shrewd eyes crinkled up in triumph, and the soft voice began to pipe a saga of a pet viper and a Pacific thunderstorm. In the last canto the faithful creature was seen by the flashes of blue lightning to creep glitteringly up the veranda and to erect itself lightning-rod-wise upon the chimney-stack; and this just in time to divert what must have been the fatal flash harmlessly down its tail to earth. Whereafter, it descended as unobtrusively to the eternal gratitude and milk of the family. By the first unwilling grin of the night the bluff skipper admitted defeat; and I followed him out, to draw deep breaths of a wind so cutting and fierce that even the frost lamps which sunrise was beginning to kindle upon the snow-slopes seemed to shiver and blink in each gust.

By Keswick the transformation was always complete. Human beings had no further claims upon interest. Their sayings, and all the kindly things they must have done for me, are not chronicled in memory. Only once, and that was happily before I had left Keswick station, did a human incident recap-

ture my attention for an instant, and succeed, remarkably, in maintaining its vividness in recollection. A genial, red-whiskered man in rough tweeds—he may be recognized as our unique John Robinson—hailed me: “Hullo, young man, oughtn’t you and I to talk?—nailed boots go straight to my heart!” Nails, I fear, are now too common a sight upon the fells to pass for an introduction: so much the mountains have gained in the number of their followers and lost of their one-time fellowship.

Otherwise, even my ‘reading’ friends figured only as pleasant accidents connected with the evening home-comings; my day-long consciousness the mountains absorbed. The more I became a master of their surface ways and natural defences the more they took possession of my imagination. For a time I kept up the unequal struggle; I flaunted maps and guide-books over their heads to prove to them that they were no more than contours and watersheds, and I even phrased their every fresh detail and event into long critical letters to myself. But they imposed themselves too imperiously: it was to be all in all, or not at all. I had to learn when among them to accept their moods, to follow their leading as that of autocrats in their own country, using an unknown speech; only to retain an individuality of my own strong enough to separate myself from them when the part they offered me in their play became too dangerous for an atom, or when they improvised upon emotions too complex for the compass of a small human intelligence. In time I grew content to be more theirs than they mine.

It is not surprising that in my recollections of a novitiate so largely occupied with the study of new atmospheres the incidents have become confused with the feelings which they created, as in a Futurist design, or are only preserved in the mould of some humour which I was borrowing from the hills. There used to be a delightful toy, a crystal ball, with a cottage or rural scene in its heart. When the globe was shaken cunningly, snow swirled, and the scene lived. In the same way, I have but to catch the right crystal of a past mood, and at a twirl all the happenings not of one but of many mountain days eddy simultaneously and vividly into life. Whole hot green days, of feverish trappings, of colt-like scampers down the slopes and of enthralling rock scrambles, days vibrating with discovery and with a nervousness of the unknown, are recoverable only as a single impression. All the hours that my unaccustomed skin was scorched up into blisters by the glare of succeeding hillsides, and all the contrasts of cold pools into which I plunged,

so irritating the blisters the more, can be re-lived in a second's recall of the one feeling of acute facial discomfort. Down the side of Great Gable I may have been groping for hours in a dense fog; and suddenly a vast black bird, big as a tar barrel, swooped straight at my head. I flung up an arm: nothing struck it; and as I lowered it again my eyes, which had been long over-straining into an imagined void, clicked back into focus. I found I was looking out through a window of dissipating cloud at a dark patch of hillside on the face of Scafell across the valley. The abrupt shifting of the limit of sight, from a white remoteness up to a threatening black proximity and back again to a reasonable aloofness, twisted the universe into a knot of dizziness, painful even to recall; and in this, as in a whirlpool, all the events of long days have spun to a centre, and revolve half-submerged, coagulated. If I am looking at the Honister Crag, impossibly distant against a morning sky, and in the same instant I am past it and struggling between the dank walls of the Pillar Stone, and still in the same instant I am stumbling back at midnight out of Borrowdale over the fell to Watendlath, convinced that all the ankle-breaking loose stones on the track are the petrified expostulations of former wayfarers, the coloured segments of that day have been torn from any context of space and time, and arrange themselves in a flat design, like the diamonds on a patchwork quilt. As on a quilt they are seen simultaneously; and, again like a quilt, they are spread out or rolled up together whenever a breath of the presiding humour of the day long past revives or recedes. On that particular day it was a humour of passive persistence, of gleeful holding on with set teeth, myself stationary, while the hills poured like a cataract under my feet, and morning and evening rushed past over my head.

Most insistent of all is the memory of a starlit winter night-fall of return over the Styhead Pass. Venus was astonishingly in the ascendant, and like a great silver gong oscillated above the hills. So incomparably brilliant, that on the slant of the snow beside me travelled a faint but perceptible violaceous darkening, my own shadow by star-shine. And all that memory is steeped in *sound*: it comes up out of the past like the singing of a choir from the clerestory of a cathedral. The harmony of the white hills and of the silvery night was so overwhelming that it filled not only sight but all the senses; and whenever imagination would now revive it, the ear of memory first responds, and to a rhythm as of chanting the star, the snow, and the silence are

reborn. The most radiant picture ever fashioned by the poetry of words must have been the child of some such night, 'when the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy.'

A number, also, of sights and incidents which seemed to conflict with what I took to be the common mood, or which the hills made use of to change the mood unexpectedly, imprompted memory in a totally different fashion, and survived for the very reason of their incongruity or of their quality of surprise: the sudden chuckle of lichen upon the rocks, heard through a clamour of storm and gloom; the intersecting of lines on different planes from opposing hills, so as to form, incalculably, a single perfect arc against the sky; the fleeting scarlet berries of a mountain ash curtsying impertinently over a time-worn jut of repellent cliff; the flashing of 'jolly jewels' under the stillness of a grey rock pool; the quiescent bodies of spongy moss dangling like strings of green or tawny rabbit-backs along the edges of hurrying waterfalls; the desperate fear that broke in tumult over my confidence when I first realized that a rock may prove steeper than it looks, and had to use my teeth to help out my handholds; the magical change of heart from angry weariness to tranquillity at the sight of a stone-chat chaffing and flirting with me out of the soundless mist. These and countless other foundlings of sight and thought are all gathered into the happy garden of little stray memories. To this there is no admission for those with useful minds, to whom their past lies open like a book with diagram and concordance. It is a fairy compensation to the forgetful. For the little lost memories to whom we have played the Pied Piper, and who have strayed after us out of time and place, are peculiarly our own, and stay with us, orphaned but dancing gleefully. They are always there; to play hide-and-seek with us in dull moments, through surroundings whose variety would shock a geographer. For the happy garden is built up of diverse fragments of scenery, glimpses unnoticed at the time, from white mountains, from northern forests, from eastern deserts, from many waters of torrent and sea and from the lanes and quiet fields. And through it, freed from all burden of likelihoods, scamper our strayaways, remembered voices, snatches of music, expressions, gestures, the spring of a child's foot, the curve of a stalk on the wind, the light of spring flowers brimming out at the edges of a copse, the feeling of the rush of a dive,—all only happy memories and all our children for life by involuntary adoption. One little rogue of a memory

gave me some concern as I grew up. It would dance and play among the others, but whenever I sought it out alone it hid impishly and peeped out at me behind my back. One day I happened to walk down a path of overhanging yews, down which I had never dared to go more than half-way as a small child. I came to a corner where the trees blocked the further view—and I recognized my little stray memory! It was what I should have seen—but did not see—had I ventured round the corner! At the same instant my playmate left me for ever. For if by some chance we repass where one of our little memories belongs, the world of fact reclaims it, and it grows up straight-way into a staid recollection with local responsibilities, never again to follow the Piper about the happy garden.

These primitive scrambling days made many recruits for my garden. It took long to master the difficulties of mountains, longer to interpret their moods rightly. My observation of the surface had to be unremitting, and my intuition of the mood was the oftener at fault. And so a host of unrelated, half-seen views, unimportant sounds and meaningless gay movements of things, portions of a complete mountain thought had I grasped it more intelligently, escaped my imperfect assembling of impressions, and dodged when and where they pleased under the threshold of consciousness into secret corners of memory. As the years went by, and I took better order with them, the shepherding came to be performed almost too thoroughly. The most irrelevant detail of the hills, every transient tone in a passing sunset, was swept up into consciousness and tenderly set back in its environment. My later children of vagrant memory are still numerous in the garden, but they are the trove of the sea, the city, and the level places. To the true mountaineer the 'precious things of the lasting hills' are a trust; and the wayward progress of a Pied Piper, of the eclectic traveller who steals the flower of every experience to thrust it as an arbitrary adornment into his personal record, seemed an unworthy trespass as soon as the terms of the trust became clear to me. The mountains were the home of their own marvellous impressions; and the vitality and force of their inspiration diminished in proportion as the impressions were separated from their home atmosphere. And the mountains were more: in return for my guardianship of their integrity they offered me a sanctuary for all the higher impulses, all the less sordid hopes and imaginings which visited me anywhere through the years. Whatever of honourable purpose or of unselfish delight the way of life suggested, I had

but to put it to the test of a mountain setting and share it, when proven, with the heights and the wind, and I could be certain of finding it again, untouched by time and reinvigorating as youth itself, whenever and wherever I returned among the hills.

Solitude was essential, as I had now discovered, for the creation of this mutual understanding with the mountains. But, as a practical consideration, while a little loneliness clarifies the mind of a man and restores his sense of proportion, more than enough makes him a little mad. On an evening descent of Grain Ghyll, where the water spurts in liquid prisms over lintels of a rock that we may call jasper, chrysoprase, jade, porphyry, beryl, serpentine, green agate, or green chalcedony, according to our sense of colour or our absence of knowledge, I became aware that the rocks and wind were speaking to me from somewhere inside my ears, with tongues, and I was startled to hear my own voice, as it were that of another person some way off, raised in loud reply. Unquestionably the emotional intimacy with nature had been carried far enough for the time. Companionship was needed to restore the balance between nature and human nature, and to enable me to obtain in the security of combination a more competent knowledge of climbing pure and simple. Instinct told me that the better climber I made myself, the less risk there would be, should I venture again alone, of this mountain exhilaration, almost exaltation, capturing the workings of the spirit to an extent irreconcilable with reason and safety.

The enterprising members of a 'reading party' responded generously to this fresh requirement. With the aid of a borrowed hay-rope we turned to serious rock climbing. The perilous cycle began with a crossing of the Pillar, where the hay-rope performed salvationist miracles upon an uncharted descent of the west face. It ended in a race for the Napes Needle in a thick fog. Now the Needle was only seldom and solemnly climbed in those days. I must have found it first; for I recollect scuttling up it like a lizard and peeping over from the shoulder. My only fear—then—was that a friend might burst out of the mist below and still beat me in the race for the top. But on the descent I jammed my knee in the well-known narrows of the crack, and I had plenty of time to absorb something of the suggestive terror of the downward view.

The passion for rock climbing caught hold. It had developed in logical order out of a steady apprenticeship to the hills, and there was no danger of the manifold interests that make up

the happiness of mountaineering being lost sight of among the apparatus of its attractive rock gymnasium. To be introduced to mountains only as to occasions for prodigious feats too often means the permanent entanglement of our feet and fingers in the outer fringes of the real mountain glory. Or, so as to disguise the truism under another metaphor, let us say that to have supped unwholesomely upon sensation at our dawn of enterprise renders us cloyed and uninterested before our midday manhood, and, often, spleenful and uninteresting in our reminiscent decline. But difficult climbing comes in its natural place when the enthusiasm for the mountain world is already a vigorous growth, and when the body, its muscles and nerves, are beginning to clamour for an increasing share in the active delight. The charm of physical effort is then no longer a distraction. To indulge and increase skill and strength serves but to multiply our opportunities for discovering new and healthy sensation, and widens and deepens the capacity of our enthusiasm to enjoy them.

We cannot walk, or climb, for long among mountains without noticing that our senses are most responsive to external impressions when the fibres of our body are working at their hardest, in harmony with the will. It was not unnatural to assume that, similarly, the mountain spirit could best be reached through the mountain forms, and that the more intricate the curves and the bolder the precipices that I climbed, the deeper I should penetrate into its subtleties of mood and meaning. Not that I looked far for such a justification. The impulse came like a lift in a long run of tide, and I was swept off gentler ways to batter against the rocks of steeper adventure with every instinct and every sinew and every chosen comrade reinforcing the inclination. In our nursery there had hung, from the beginning of time, two pictures of the limestone cliffs of Gordale Scar, labelled by the donor 'The road to church' and 'The road from church.' I did not suspect a joke, and certainly never conceived of not going to church! So I always saw the pictured precipices peopled by flocks of volitant little boys, in Sunday sailor suits, prayer-book in hand, and headed by a balloon-like governess with an umbrella. This trick of the eye returned anew. I now saw every actual crag which I passed plastered with imaginary limpet figures, in a more rational garb; and since they were no longer to fly but to clamber up it safely, every rift and boss on such a crag had to be tried or inspected in order to make certain that its fashion of structure would render their progress probable.

The dissimilar fastnesses, for they were then still fastnesses, of Wales, of Scotland, of Ireland, and of many sea-cliffs and accidental crags, supplied each something towards the training of the muscles and of the eye, and through them towards my gradual understanding of hills. The climber's quest urges him deep into the innermost recesses of the mountains, and keeps him relatively stationary, but alert, for long periods. He has time to familiarize himself with a view under changing aspects of light, to pierce below details and to ascertain the relationship, and the intention, of its line and form. He learns to see essentials, as an artist sees them. The significance or purpose of multiple small evidences, of many single discoveries, emerges for him as a generalization, a new classification. The Coolin and the abrupt mountains of the western coasts are then first seen to have reason for their excessive severity, because of their association with the sea, its level relief and complement of luminous motion. The precipitance of the Cumbrian fells, compressed and hurrying together to shake off the encroachment of the plains, has a new meaning; they are competing like forest trees for the sunlight, and concern themselves with little but their display of eminence and skyline; and in order that our eye may have no leisure to judge them disdainful of their valleys, it is swept daringly upward over the lines of connection by a profusion of mounting foot-hills, of wing-bluffs and scarpments, each a model of mountain outline in miniature. Among the Yorkshire uplands, rightly called the Dales, the skyline is little regarded, and the hills are but supports, between which the folds and hollows of the dales are suspended in noble curves of ever-changing tension. In the Cheviot neither the hill nor the valley predominates: they excel in the sheer simplicity of their junction, in the contrast of the bold spring of the bases of the hills with the meadow flatness of the river valleys. Throughout the mountains of Wales the height and fall of the peak and the fall and rise of the valley are linked in an inseparable and continuous perfection of line; so that neither may be considered apart: we cannot feel that their summits belong only to the region of clouds nor their depressions only to the low lands, their opposition seeming like the unbroken undulation in the surface of an isolated, higher world. On the lesser ranges, the wolds and the wealds, Chiltern, Wrekin, Grampian, Quantock, Inkpen, Cotswold, Mendip—what a turbulence of rugged jovial sounds are these names of old British hills!—unassuming outline takes heart under a bravery of verdure and coloration.

The grandeur of Northumbrian moorland is confident in its monotony, for it cannot be seen except in haughty kinship with its only neighbour, the wind-driven sky. The Cornish moors without great expanse or seclusion to give them feature rely at the last upon their surprise of summit tors to recall the proximity of granite cliff and surf and the pageant of forgotten races.

These Cornish headlands had another and a very different association, one agreeable with a time when solitude seemed still distasteful and the unbroken circle of friends formed a halo surrounding every hour of active living. For it was on their northern cliffs that there came to George Macaulay Trevelyan and myself the idea of the mountain Man Hunt; an enticing and agonizing game which for more than a quarter of a century has pricked the silences of summer hills with outbursts of excited voices and the furious thudding of feet. But in those idealistic days even a flint summer-house seemed rich with climbing interpretations, and haystacks and trees were volumes filled with guileful suggestion.

In this way it came about that when I returned again to the northland fells I was ready for a more responsible share in the partnership with the mountains. I had learned that the fun of climbing was grounded upon discipline, a discipline of the mind as well as of the strength; that the mountains themselves followed design; and that the exultation of the spirit among them had law for its base. I felt myself, indeed, sufficiently prepared to meet any further phase of revelation with the self-reliance and self-restraint of a mountaineering manhood. And the capriciousness—or was it the wisdom?—of the hills responded, at the very gateway of entry into my new kingdom, by giving me back—my childhood, and its fairyland!

As I walked out into Borrowdale I was recalling, to make a rhythm for the feet, the stately passages which recount how the revelation of the mountain was once made to Moses. He had gone prepared; he had gone with comrades for the hills, but alone to meet the Voice; and he had returned from the mystery of clouds and height bringing—law. And at that moment the cloud-bank parted over a high sunrise, and above the dark end of the valley floated into sight an island of silver crests—wintry Glaramara, snow-domed and glittering through a clear window of sky, infinitely high, not of the race of snow-hills that I knew, but of the mountains I had dreamed.

In other years these recurring visions of great peaks, cloud-girt in space, home-lands for all the gods of our fancy, have never

failed to kindle each their own fresh wonder, their own renewed excitement : Olympus, a rolling tableland of snow drifting above a haze of lilac coast and sea ; Mont Blanc from the Val Veni, a moonlit spire framed in a grey corona of glacier and travelling mist ; Snowdon on an arctic evening, a white cone far out against the sea, with the red sword-rays of sunset about its summit. But that first sight, the hidden promise on the snows of Glaramara, joined hands across the amazement of the moment with the dreamland of the past. I was again a boy, possessed with the shapes of an imagined alpine world. Nor was that all the revelation which the mountains purposed for this moment. The road, unaccountably, became a lane, between towering hedges in place of the hills ; and above, in mid-sky, the snows flamed suddenly into a cupola of pink glass, out of which something strange and friendly from fairyland was just going to appear, for me alone.

The wind from those snows of Glaramara, from the dream-heights of boyhood, from the fairy palaces of childhood, blew upon a tide of longing for greater glacial peaks which had been rising steadily and imperceptibly during all the years of unconscious preparation. At its breath the first wave—of full, conscious recognition, and of resolve—crested and broke. For over thirty uneasy, happy years the wind has blown challengingly, and the waves of response have crested and swept against it ceaselessly, to break now upon this mountain range, now upon that ; and although among the chances of life they have spent something of their force and frequency, time has brought no stilling of the desire, no hungering for calm.

CHAPTER II

THE GATEWAY TO THE MOUNTAINS

Sunlight, and in spring :
and little else matters :
light and song, children of kindly heat,
of sunshine from cool snows.
The wind sings, and scatters
messages from the sun about my feet,
light and the song of spring,
leaf of the almond-blossom and early rose.

OUR early years are spent in a summer-house, with views all ways upon a sunlit garden. We pass the days in a happy skirmish from window to window, pulling up blind after blind and discovering new prospects of pleasure and adventure. During our evening of life, as the shadow of disillusionment or of lost companionship falls across each vista of colour in turn, shrouding even the recollection of its former brightness under a pain we dare not disturb, we make again our slower circuit ; and resolutely, if we are wise, we reclose blind after blind, upon views which can now only suggest memories too lightless to be healthful. We may be content if we can sit at the last by at least one window of free contemplation, opening still upon clear distance, still comfortable with colour—although it be but colour borrowed from the sunset.

But between the earlier and the later outlook, during the noon of our active manhood, when we are free of our years of enforced preparation for life and not yet recaptured by its voluntary responsibilities, the view from the windows alone does not satisfy restless temperaments. Of one or more windows, if we are fortunate, we make doorways of escape ; and we hurry out, to explore for ourselves their sunlit promise.

These adventures, in direct light, we live vitally. We absorb every actual and coloured instant of them into our personality. They are our share in the movement of living, the fulfilment in action of our childish dreams, and the substance of our later philosophy. But, at the time, such moments of experience suc-



ceed one another too rapidly, they are too crowded with novel realities for us to be able to record them detachedly or in right proportion. Their effects upon ourselves become at once confused with their incidents. And we have no leisure and little inclination, while our activity persists, to restore order to them, still less to disentangle them from less conscious influences, hereditary and educational, which continue all the while to mould our thought and character as enduringly as our own self-sought experiences.

For this reason contemporary impressions of our period of adventure suffer from many of the faults of instantaneous views. Details in the foreground of memory are distorted by their surprising reality at the time for ourselves; the mood of the moment prevails in them regardless of perspective; while transmitted prejudices have often tampered freely with their focus. And yet, to readjust our impressions from our later unified point of view must deprive them of the freshness and fidelity which may be their only excuse for recall. There remains, then, only a way of compromise: to preserve unaltered the very different atmospheres in which the adventures were experienced, and recorded, as sunshine and shadow chased one another down the afternoon over our playground; but to exercise an older onlooker's freedom of comment and of modification of emphasis, in reviewing the ill-assorted detail from our single window of memory.

It was, for instance, natural that a succession of real Alpine sunrises, storm-peaks and exciting doings should have gradually ousted from mind the mountain-land of visionary childhood, and that the process should have appeared only pleasant in so far as it was even perceptible. It is equally natural that, when the doing is over, the dreamland should return, and that memory should be eager to define the progress of so notable a change and restore some thread of unity to the impressions.

Under the impulse of a stirring ascent or at the discovery of some breathless view, I did, indeed, occasionally make the effort to recapture for this moment or that summit something of the enchantment familiar in childish anticipation; and I invariably failed, since the remembered emotion would never fit rightly upon the sight or incident of the moment. A like disappointment may come of the attempt to trace a line of development in the relationship between these old mountain happenings and my always changing but never wholly definable feeling for hills. If it be so, the way of the mountains with a boy may still perhaps be read from between the lines of his very inability to record more than small incidents and passing feelings while he was still

out of doors ; and something of the inexplicable mystery of the mountain spell may emerge even from a later failure to suggest any connected order in the fashion of its working, from the window of memory.

During my first Long Vacation at Cambridge, the elder brother of the Cornish walks, the begetter of all new and thrilling sports, led us upon an exploration of the river Tarn, then still an almost unvisited river. Canadian canoes were pushed along the railways of France by urgent telegrams ; and when the canoes finally stuck, we followed, and propelled them on horse-trolleys over the bare limestone plateaux, and lowered them by ropes into the river gorge.

There followed ten days of brilliant fun and sunburn. Life became a succession of shallow, rock-spiked rapids. Upon the look-out man craning over the bow lay the responsibility of deciding whether the canoe would or would not ride safely down each shallow fall. Whenever he shouted " Jump ! " we leapt overboard as one man, and swam down the rapid, steering the canoe as well as we might with our hands through the swirl and the jagged rocks. Where the fall was too great, we ' carried over ' : a painful pilgrimage for bare feet over the stones, until we discovered the uses of scarpetti or espadrilles, the local rope-soled sandals.

We upset the canoes on an average twice a day. We lived in shirts and shoes, and lost our other clothes. Our skins scorched till they blistered. We seemed to be shooting endlessly through deep gorges of pink and gold limestone, upon a ribbon of green crystal. Folk looked out at us from cave-dwellings in the cliffs, continuously inhabited since the first man drew his first elk on its own shattered horn. Sometimes we passed fishermen, their brown bodies swashing through the water to scare the fish into their nets. On the cliff above, other primitives were creating tiny vineyards, carrying the soil up on their backs to spread it on a limestone ledge before their cave. If ever the ledge broke, or a higher ledge fell upon it, they started work again upon another.

We lived upon bread, so hard and black that the wrinkled women chipped off wedges of the loaf for us with a wood-axe ; upon goats'-milk cheese and goats'-milk ; and, after these, cows'-milk when we met it again, tasted mustily of hay and cattle. For luxuries, we had crude local wine, almonds and apricots, and laughter. We guarded one large chunk of once-white sugar,

which rolled about in the canoe-litter all day, and was greedily sucked by anyone overcome by a sudden craving for sweetness. We hauled out the canoes at night on to limestone ledges, pitched our tent, and slept round fires of dried sticks.

As the youngest, I was cook. I had prepared myself anxiously for this and read Mrs. Beeton from cover to cover. The expositions delighted me, but their effect was discouragement ; for they seemed to start every recipe with the formidable order—" Take a pint of cream ! " Professional cooks had spent hours in instructing me how to wash out a bottle, grill a beefsteak and manipulate a light hand about a vol-au-vent ; but, alas, the opportunity for displaying these accomplishments was never again mine. Our cunning stove was soon lost in the first deep rapid. We dived for it in vain ; the boil of water under the overhanging rock was too deep and swift. So finally we tied two of our bamboo punt-poles together, drove them to the bottom, and watched our best diver climb shimmeringly down them into the green depths. But he only came up with the iron stove-stand, and declined to try again. My recurring triumph was a biscuit and raisin pudding. The biscuit-tin was immersed and rescued at least once a day, and the wet white biscuits were then spread out to dry in the sun. After the second day they could be flipped in the fingers like white buckskin, wherefore the pudding was a popular solution. In the end even the biscuit-tin came in useful, to patch the holes made daily by the rapids in the canoes. A second huge tin, of marmalade, was always our companion, one which proved still more welcome during our later journeyings in the East. The rescue of its slowly sinking bulk was our first concern after each swamp, and this especially during its pristine fullness ; for in the emptiness of time an air-chamber formed under the lid which kept it bobbing hopefully down to an easier salvage below the rapid.

When we emerged from the gorges and approached civilization a levy had to be made upon the scant remainder of the party's raiment ; and our Benjamin, in a garb of more colour than continuity, was despatched to the nearest village to secure garments for the rest.

The canoes, it may be added, gave a last display of rapid-shooting and punting tricks before the supper-gladdened eyes of the local *jeunesse dorée*, and were handsomely disposed of in the evening light before their biscuit-tin patches relented.

I had seen in Cambridge that a journey, of no account on the map, would take me from the Cévennes to Savoy. A Trinity

friend, Felix Levi—the loss of whose brilliant intellect and sympathy, in a Himalayan earthquake, cast the first shadow upon our circle—had promised to meet me there with our new climbing outfit. This meeting at the other end of a map-world, under the shadow of those magic capitals ‘THE ALPS,’ had promised all the romance with which the first great mountaineering adventure ought to be surrounded.

I started alone, with one French phrase—“à quelle heure arriverai-je à?”—as my passport; and banged in a nervous isolation across the south of France. Every one seemed to be very cheerful—and very odd! Even if I couldn’t ‘place’ my fellow-travellers, surely they ought to see at once where I belonged! Well, if they were satisfied to put me down as a travelling photographer’s assistant, because of my camera, instead of what I was,—foreign folk understood even less than I expected them to! And every one seemed to travel at night, and all the trains to run then! After midnight our big open carriage became a dancing fair of mantillas and roses and uniforms and rough gaiety. The engine-driver joined in. His standing joke, after every halt, was to start the train with a jerk, so that all our heads cracked back against the partitions through a squeal of laughing protest. Not unnaturally he broke the coupling behind the engine; and we all turned out on to the line in the tepid moonlight, and made suggestions as to the repairs, which were effected chiefly by string. Even then I was puzzled by the guard’s theory of strains; for, to ease the pull upon the string, we were all excluded from the front carriages and crowded boisterously into the rear of the train.

Carcassonne at sunset, Nîmes, Avignon, Orange, even Tarascon!—it was an avenue of coloured impressions to the mountain world. Baedeker was our first climber’s guide-book, and he said things about the little col du Palet in small print at the foot of the page which had determined me that this should be our first pass. We had taken advice bashfully as to our outfit; but my friend, who had grown up under the wing of one of the great and early Alpine climbers, could only recall one fragment of his counsel, which he gurgled to me at intervals,—“My boy, what you most need in the Alps is a good drink! Now, if you take six bottles of red wine and three of white, a flask of curaçao, some cognac and chartreuse, two siphons, four lemons, some sugar, a little spice—and don’t forget the ice!—and make your guide carry a large-sized ‘dampschiff’ to mix it in,—well, then, you’ll be sure of a sound drink or so on your peak!” Even without

these requisites we tramped rather overladen, with overcoats and other paraphernalia. Each of our sacks, with a coat and a railway-rug piled upon it, weighed some forty pounds.

We toiled up a broiling white road all a dusty day, and lighted upon a miracle of white wine in the inn below the pass. To which whiteness did we owe the madness of a scarlet rash that followed? But Levi's versatility proved equal to the emergency, with flat bowls of lukewarm tea; and we were able to start after all at midnight for our first snow adventure.

There was no more than a hard snowfield on the col du Palet, and a wilted and dingy one at that! But never a glacier has since seemed so noble. We made the most of its non-existent terrors, under a grey dawn; and plodded afterwards down the spring alps to Val d'Isère with the gravity becoming to proven mountaineers.

The snow camel-back of the Pointe de la Sana was our first summit. It was enlivened by a quixotic search for Mont Iseran, whose existence W. B. Coolidge had just finally disproved. The Aiguille de la Grande Motte gave us the thrills of a first great peak. While descending the snow-cap, my friend slipped out, and it was almost with pleasure that I verified one piece of my book-lore—how easily a man is pulled from his steps on a steep wall. We stopped ourselves, with every Alpine resource, on the lip of probably the most harmless little bergschrund which ever yawned theatrically.

In a hot grey mist we worked out a route up the Tsanteleina. This was a foretaste of real mountaineering. There was something of an icefall, and steps to cut, and some blind steep rocks to scale. I concealed my inward trepidation under a stout assurance. But I was a little put out. These were not the brick-red rocks jutting out of blue ice under white snow-crests, which an early monograph on the Doldenhorn—the only Alpine book in the library at home, with coloured illustrations which I had learned by heart—had led me to expect. But then, Levi's Alpine authority had declared that we ought not to go to Savoy if we wanted real peaks; and there, day after day to the north of us, loomed the great south dome of Mont Blanc far in the sky, to prove him right. If lesser peaks that were not real Alps could give so much uncertainty and excitement, there might, I pondered, be something still for us to learn from guides and from the regular, less romantic approaches.

A sunny ascent of the Grande Sassièrè decided the question. We diagnosed a cornice on the ridge we were ascending, and

agreed that we were skirting it warily. We looked back from the summit along our snow edge, and unanimously abused the 'fool of a fox' whose tracks we could see in the snow far too close to the supposed cornice. We discovered on our way down that these tracks had been our own!—but at the same time chance revealed to us that there was no cornice to the ridge after all! The complicated comedy of our errors was chastening, and led in the end to wiser methods.

But for the time the fun was too good to interrupt. We wandered over the col de la Leisse, and were arrested on the grounds of our appearance alone, because my companion persisted in safeguarding his complexion under a death-mask of bilberry-coloured grease. We slept with herds and their cattle in high chalets, and fed upon polenta and drank cream from wooden rummers. Only once again did mere food look so attractive, and that was at Nessel, when we walked thither from Belalp; and the children of Nessel with their marigold faces, pale-blue eyes and bleached hair used to spread round each of us on the grass a circle of wooden bowls of wild strawberries alternating with larger bowls of yellow cream. And yet that Nessel rest-hour was too often spoiled by companions who insisted upon reciting from Shelley or Lycidas. To read, or write, poetry, even pastoral poetry, in its appropriate scenery is amiable, but an error. The cow, the complete hedonist, never makes the mistake of chewing the cud and munching the buttercups simultaneously.

The hotels of Pralognan tried to reconvert us to civilization. But we escaped from them, to roll on the alps for days together, among beds of lilies and all the flaming blossom of southern meadows in June. It is a misfortune for those of us who are not able to remember the names of flowers or greet them by their families. But as a compensation each month's new blend of colour, form, and smell remains a constant sunbreak of surprise. Familiar or strange flowers belong, then, only to their setting, to the scenes in which they were discovered or rediscovered; and the thought of them continues inseparable from that larger impression. The memory of any flower may become, for such as us, as much the memory of the wind or of the stillness which betrayed its form, of the sunlight which shone through the colour of its petals, or of the vision of the hills and fields surrounding it, which returns ever afterwards astonishingly at any hint upon the air of the same sweetness of scent.

Fairy godmothers take a prominent part in the encouragement of young mountaineers; and not seldom they appear in

the form of a kindly and generous aunt. Mine¹ wafted me across the ranges, from Savoy into the greater alps; and for years provided me with an ark of hotel refuges, with picnic teas on off days, and with a sympathetic but critical understanding of my longer mountaineering flights, and of their faithful recounting, which was as wholesome as it was witty. We were always on the verge of performing some great feat together; even the traverse of the Rothhorn and of the Dent Blanche from the east were discussed! And once or twice in the years the dream materialized, and sixty and twenty cut some original route up the ice-mazes of the Great Aletsch glacier, or defeated a rock pinnacle, with an equal enthusiasm that obliterated any disparity of years.

But on many days during the first season in the Val d'Anniviers, I was alone. Because guides were luxuries, and, of still more consequence, it took long to overcome that shyness of mixing with men of a different language and class which weighs heavily upon a type of public-school-bred islander. Guides, too, belonged to a realm apart, the remote world of the great Alpine chronicles. A Real Guide, with an axe and a past, I looked at from a modest distance down the mule-path, as a new boy at school admires yet evades a member of last year's Eleven.

On solitary scrambles over the Bella Tola, round the back of the Diablons, and over into the wild and then seldom visited Turtmannthal, with senses sharpened by watchful solitude, I slowly amassed experience. The sight of the perpetual semi-circle of great Pennine peaks, rounding off the valley, made me familiar with the shapes of glacier and of great snow ridge; and incidentally developed a passion for the glorious skylines of the Weisshorn and the Matterhorn which no number of ascents upon those two mountains, each in their own way supreme, has ever served to satisfy.

A bolder venture, in the beginning of a second season, was a lonely ascent of the Pigne de l'Allée, from Zinal. On the col at daybreak I sighted a guided party ascending from the farther, Ferpècle side; and they hailed me anxiously and courteously to join their rope. But I was still timid of real mountaineers. And I dashed ahead of them, chipping steps up the sharp, hard snow to the summit, hurried down the far ridge on to the Moiry glacier, and so ran down and away round the Garde de Bordon and back to Zinal, in a fashion farouche enough to have started a new legend of the 'wild boy of the mountains.'

¹ Georgina Mary Kennedy, Mrs. J. H. Tuke.

After that the fairy godmother was inspired to wave her wand once again. In the train of some of the kindest of hotel acquaintances I was wafted over to Belalp, in the Oberland; and there settled down to a real Alpine apprenticeship, in surroundings which have always remained my Alpine home.

Clemenz Ruppen must then have been already in the fifties: long, uncouth, with unexpected angles in his figure, and open-ankled boots which stuck out oddly behind his hard thin legs. Yet, as he touched rocks, or trod ice, or swung into a tireless lope over rough ground, all these kinks seemed to ease into curves of strength, and he moved ahead with the security and grace of a rugged faun. The grinding life of a mountain peasant had worn and warped him, physically and mentally; but it had left the vivacious spirit untouched. In his youth he had been trained under Professor Tyndall; and that influence survived even the mannerisms acquired during thirty years of dependence upon hotel custom, mannerisms which were dropped and again resumed almost comically on the precise edge of the hotel 'piazza.' An irrepressible boyishness and gallant humour of adventure crept round all his crabbed corners and leaked through his gnarls and wrinkles,—no matter whether his poverty were suggesting to him how much more fortunate his rival, Tony Walden, appeared with his nine cows and no children, than he himself with two cows and nine children; whether he was plotting our next climb mysteriously with me in his smoky cabin and whispering craftily "habe was *neues* für Sie, Herr Jung!"; or rollicking along a ridge which he had 'discovered' with the transparent nonchalance of a schoolboy caught in an escapade; or—a familiar picture—glancing back over his shoulder as we tramped home at evening, and subduing his exultation in our triumph to a deprecatory "sind Sie zufrieden, Herr?" as we approached the edge of the fatal piazza! His eyes were interpreters of his character, and of his way of life. Behind narrow, crooked slits in a brown crinkled walnut of a head and face, there flickered a light-blue volcano of mischief and enterprise, far too lively for its limited outlets.

Clemenz would maintain, on all occasions, that he was not "a first-class guide—like those over there!"—pointing at the Pennines away across the Rhone valley. But he knew his own mountains backward, and in a more frequented region might have become a notable name. He had climbed the Aletschhorn, even then, some hundred times; the Nesthorn more often than he could remember; and a safer, more agile master of rock or

ice, for all his years, and a bolder, saner adventurer, for all his quaint ways, never loved the hills more for what they were than for what they earned him.

To him, late in time, came another chance, a boy to lead, eager for the rules as for the romance of the game. He made of it the jolliest of companionships. In the dark hours before dawn I would be awakened by a hoarse guttural of patois, the language of the lungs rather than of the mouth, and, for me, always the right language of the mountains. Until I was really up and dressed, the grizzled head continued to peep in and out round the cautiously held door. Our sacks were all but ready overnight; and away we would swing in the dark, up or down the nearer slopes, with the fresh wet smell of grass and lilies brushing up from our feet, and the cold shiver of the wind before dawn stirring across a grey promise of light, and chasing the last of sleep from under its cover of clammy clothing. The memory of a 'short' day in the Alps is, for me, always associated with the early smell of dew-wet herb or pine-needles, or of wet moraine-grit on ice, combining not disagreeably with the suggestion of peat-smoked felt or duffle from the shadowy figure ahead. Just as the memory of a 'big' day comes back to the clean 'stony' taste on the tongue of the night-wind off sunless glacier, mixed with the friendly sickliness of scorched metal and candle-grease from the lantern ahead or swinging in my hand.

What a number of 'new' ascents Clemenz had in reserve!—to be now exploited with the glee of a truant! With what jokes and secrecy we planned and carried through their conquest! Afterwards we solemnly debated and fixed their 'tariffs' for other climbers, over a bowl of smoky cream in his cabin, while his straw-haired, blue-eyed children peered at different levels round the door-posts. There was always a new buttress or ridge to be explored on that admirable training ground, the Belgrat; and when those were exhausted, there was sure to be some section of the 'true crest' of the grat still to be traversed, where—"Herr X or Y had turned the difficulties below." Day after day we raced over the glaciers and over the ridges like young sheep, and Clemenz was the more inventive of the two. If ever a 'true' crest failed us, then there were our forerunners' 'times' to be bettered. The clouds must have laughed to hear his comments: "How long did we take from the Graf to the Wittwe, Herr? only 15 minutes! Well, well! Mr. X took an hour and a half!—and *he* emptied three gourds of lemonade!" I have already mourned my early renunciation of the pleasant habit of drinking

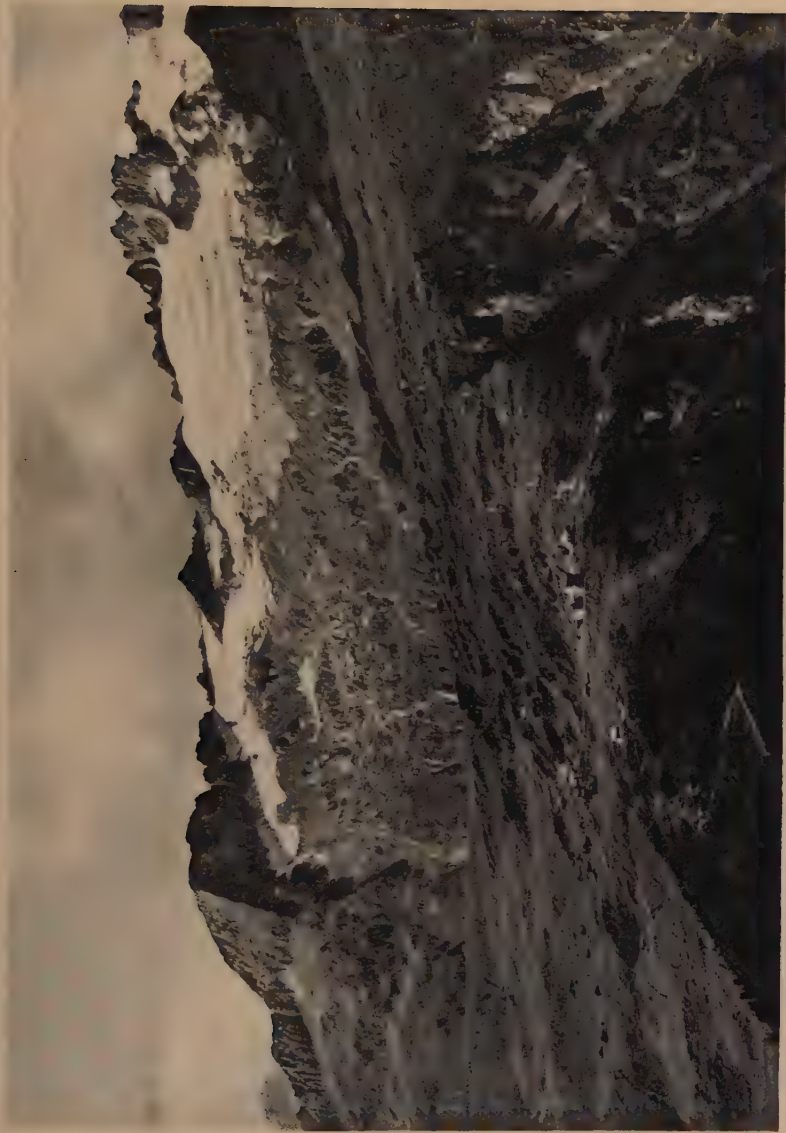
during a climbing day ; but I was persuaded not a little by the flavour of Clemenz' raw-hide flask, a cruse of never-empty antiquity, into which the various liquids of succeeding days were splashed. The heart of thirst I learned to break by sucking bitter withered prunes, the 'Schwetzgen' peculiar to Alpine hotels.

We travelled all the visible skylines. The Gisighorn from the east was an ascent new in part ; and from the summit we followed the whole length of its northern ridge, a fine new rock climb, with one awkward abseiling into a deep nock, and a yet more awkward slab up out of that again. That was a day of golden letters ; for we presently left the ridge, where the glacier swept up to and through the rocks, at a dip which we christened the Kinderjoch, ran up along the lip of the glacier, and climbed back on to the ridge again, to make the first ascent of a big rock pyramid, then unnamed and unclimbed. With the gravity befitting the first ascent of a new Alpine peak, we named it the 'Dame Alys,' in honour of my mother. Years later I returned, with George Mallory, to resume the traverse of the further section of this good ridge, which joins the Gisighorn to the Unterbächhorn ; and in the course of a dramatic little climb, of the Snowdon type, we crossed yet another unclimbed peak just under the Unterbächhorn ; and this we named 'der Enkel,' in honour of the birth of my mother's first grandson.

With my proposal to ascend the imposing south-east ridge of the Nesthorn, up to that time only descended, Clemenz, for some matter of local superstition, would have nothing to do ; and an effort of mine to break the spell in conjunction with a local cow-herd, began with chilly nights out in wet blankets on faulty ledges, and ended in futile days of feverish scrambling. But with Clemenz I explored all the little-known desolation of the Gredetschthal under the south face of the Nesthorn, and even coursed, for a very long day, over into the Baltschiederthal under the Bietschhorn, and back again. Before the near view which that day gave us of the less-haunted south ridge of the Nesthorn Clemenz' scruples weakened.

We reinforced our moral by a secret treaty with a local chamois-hunter : Knellen, I think, his name. Do such wild and gentle hill-men exist still ? He had round childlike blue eyes twinkling through a bush of black beard ; and it was only in the dusk that he would venture even so far into civilization as Clemenz' chalet, to arrange our campaign.

The south ridge fell, to an attack almost comic in vein. Knellen on a rope was like a cat in a halter. When he remem-



Gisighorn

Dame Alys

BELALP

Enkel

Unter-
Bachhorn

Belgrat

bered he was on one, he shook with laughter and rolled himself up in it impossibly. When he did not, which was for most of the day, he gambolled off at sudden tangents, swarming up and poising upon accidental pinnacles, and careering madly down the rubble and slabs in pursuit of invisible chamois. Into these chases, some of long duration, we were drawn, as much by laughter as by the rope that united us; and when, from some cliff far down in the Gredetschthal, we at last sighted the quarry, we—all weaponless—howled together and hurled rocks into the emptiness, until the lazy chamois conceded the formal point, that we were 'Jäger,' and ambled away into the Baltschiederthal. Then, of course, we were free to climb laboriously up again to the head of the valley, and recommence our interrupted assaults upon the south ridge. The climb itself took the occasion more seriously. It forced even Knellen at last into line, up a bold red rib pinched between the glacier-facets of the big peak. We climbed out upon the summit, late in the day, and, even so, completely to Knellen's amazement. During all his years of hunting in these valleys he had never been on a high peak or believed that the white summits were humanly climbable. Clemenz brought us down the north side unerringly in the half-light; and the experience proved of value in a later year, when my party reached the same point after—at last—climbing the great south-east ridge, and it remained for us to descend the north face safely and swiftly before the oncoming of total darkness.

The numerous and attractive pinnacles of the Fusshörner, skyscraping above the further bank of the Ober Aletsch glacier like the half of a troll's spiked coronet set up on edge, gave us oft-repeated fun. "Wollen noch a neu' Fusshor' mache', Herr!" Clemenz would say, with a throaty chuckle and a stealthy wave of his hand, as we sat gossiping on that length of the piazza-wall which overhangs the Great Aletsch glacier some thousand feet below. And then he would glance round mysteriously, lest his gesture might have betrayed the covert design to the nut-faced old women spinning on the slopes above us. We invented a new way up the highest northern point, following first a tricky ice couloir up the western precipice, and then the southern ridge of the cone. We disagreed also, I remember, as to the proper exit from that couloir; and each in the end climbed his own branch of the Y-fork, managing the rope artistically across the dividing nose of rock which concealed us from each other. Again, on the bombastic walls flanking the more central Fusshorn summits we spent some rollicking days, and some anxious hours—

for they are 'unverschämt steil!' Finally we turned our attention to the unclimbed southerly spikes. With A. M. Mackay as third man we scaled the last point but one. And the final crack on to its summit-tower was voted so meritorious, that we returned yet once again to the assault, and added to our conquests the final and independent south peak. At last there remained only of the Fusshörner the fantastic Cleopatra's Needle to the south of the peak first climbed by George Yeld. Clemenz shook a disapproving head at this, from many points of view: it was—"unmögli, und wann niet unmögli,—ungeheuer!" But the vertical walls of the Fusshörner, sheer and clean as if cut by a machine-saw on the side overhanging the Triest glacier, continued to challenge me as I viewed them on sprints up and down the Aletsch glacier—always our highway to the greater Oberland peaks. And in a later summer I came back with C. K. Clague, and we climbed even this spire; first by a couloir up its pedestal from the Triest glacier, and then onward up the 'truly perpendicular' vane. But, alack, we found on the top evidence that a party of Swiss students had beaten us by one day for the honour of first ascent. So we made a scornful 'col' of the inaccessible peak, and glissaded down the western couloir of their ascent from the Ober Aletsch glacier. Perhaps we were too scornful. For the couloir was quick to emphasize the lesson how easy it is, in the dashing progress of what I have elsewhere named 'alternate glissading,' to twitch an untried anchor-man out of his snow-stance behind and above us without ourselves even feeling the jerk on the rope that has snatched him head-foremost into our flying wake! We disentangled ourselves with reproachful dignity on the lower snow-slopes; and could only hope that Clemenz had not been watching us through the hotel telescope.

The Zenbächenhörner, farther to the east, thrusting up a brave line into the sky above the Triest glacier, were, I think, Clemenz' last treasure-horde. He had kept them, probably, as a prospect of romance to console tired evenings in his small oasis of goat-pasture and cabin, contrived between the bald, confluent moraines of the Aletsch, Ober Aletsch and Triest glaciers. But I had read opposite their name in my Coolidge's Oberland Guide the fateful words—'No Information':—words flaming for the aspirant with all the magic which the letters 'Land of Gog and Magog,' sprawled across unknown regions in early maps, must have spelled for mediæval explorers and merchant venturers.

We passed the preceding night hours in a long supper and a short sleep, under the openwork lid of the moraine cabin,

fretted by the stars. Cooking and conversation stood high among Clemenz' talents. He could brew a chocolate that made me heedless of the ankle-deep snow-leak on the flooring, or of green mould and icy mildew penetrating from the plank upon which I sat. And his dry confidences about his climbs with earlier patrons in the district gave to one who knew their own classic narratives almost by heart the sense of forming one among the audience at an Euripidean drama. They possessed me of the same inner knowledge of Fate denied to the protagonists, and kept me similarly expectant of the irony of the Guide-god's salvationist appearances whenever the insoluble complications threatened general extinction—in a crevasse for choice. Clemenz spent his Zenbächenhörner lavishly, in the carouse of a single boisterous day. They are serrated, goodly ridges; and they were traversed all too quickly for their fractious promise.

Always we tried to get back before the sun should have set behind the western ridges and forsaken the little Belalp lake, a glacier tear-pool caught up in a fold of green alp above the Rhone valley. Clemenz thought my evening bathe in ice-fed waters gravely humorous. But he defended it loyally to the public, the public of goat-boys with coloured waist-scarves and kine-maidens with bright head-kerchiefs, who used to materialize unaccountably with their tinkling shadows of flocks out of the darkening amphitheatre of glacier and sunset-slope above, to watch me. To them it was explained, I think, as my 'evening drink,' and its purpose was to relieve a worthy guide of the necessity of carrying more liquid than he needed himself during the heat of the day. I usually ran on ahead nearing home, to anticipate the climbing shadow; and Clemenz would emerge later on the rocky bluffs on the far side of the tarn, and stand sentinel. For a time he would watch the headers, leaning on his axe, himself as rugged and motionless as the shadowed ridges into which the dusk was withdrawing him; and then, with a solemn chuckle, swaying shoulders and the easy knee-spring of the mountain-born, he would fade away to his chalet. Whereupon the goat and kine-herds would seem to appear and disappear more closely among the hillocks, never moving when I looked their way, appearing always to be sitting and intent upon some happening on the horizon, but at every glance perceptibly nearer, in a contracting semicircle, until the sun went down and the bathe was finished.

On 'off' days we practised on the glacier, cutting step-ladders up and down through the great icefalls, and breaking

our, or at least my, knuckles on ice glissades. Idle, sun-glittering days, on a world of broken light. What a blue of heaven laughed in dimples where the axe had chipped its stairway up the white severity of a frozen spire ; or escaped along the shallow rifts into which we dipped the mother-of-pearl shell for its runlet of silver ! And that deeper, deepening blue of the crevasses, which we leaped to gladden muscles a little stubborn with their surfeit of labour the day before ! Even new climbs were not more keenly debated than our pebble-chucking competitions during the after-lunch pipe-dawdles—who should be the first to knock over a balanced stone. And always at the close of day came that fear-some drag up the ‘corkscrews’ from glacier to hotel. It hung so sorely over our spirits that we had perforce to turn it into a race ; continually lowering the ‘record’ time, until it stood at something under half an hour. Clemenz, who had not the temptation of the bathe at the top to lure him on, used cunningly to prolong our last halt by the glacier brink, in the hope that some herd or younger guide, returning across the glacier, might arrive in time to take up the challenge and leave him to the obscurity of a more sagacious ascent.

When the purse would reach to it, we made longer flights, to the greater peaks. I remember especially an ascent of the Aletschhorn, the third to be made direct by its western ridge. On the summit we found that the condition of the snow precluded a descent by the north face to the Concordia ; and so we had to come down the south wall on to the Mittel Aletsch glacier, descend to its junction with the Great Aletsch, and by this long detour zigzag round to the Concordia Pavillon. It was a long, fast day, in sunlight ; and we sped up and down the glaciers for hours which still seem too few for the distance on the map.

The Aletschhorn was my first big mountain. All the evening before I had watched from the crow’s-nest of the little Ober Aletsch hut above the glacier the sun setting behind the Nesthorn opposite, using its miles of close-ranked pinnacles as a tooth-comb for the outpouring of a running music of colour. The solid rock edges seemed soaked in red light, even as fire-glow can make a semi-transparency of the closed fingers we lift to screen it. And I had become sensible of a hollowness of mood, of a physical catch in the breath, in part the excitement, in part the anxiety, in part the impatience which precede momentous action. No custom ever quite banished this. In war-time the sensation even became commonplace, the ‘night-before-attack’ feeling ; and we confessed to it more readily.

On the summit, the next day, my first impression of great height, and of the immensity of a view out and over mountains hitherto only glimpsed from below and at a distance, remains unforgettable. But almost more novel seemed the changes produced by height in nearer objects. The white dry glare of the snow looked lifeless; the dun wounds bruised upon it by our boots were blanched; colour seemed to have lost all liveliness of tone with the thinning of high air. Our own faces and hands, and our clothes, had taken on a more subdued tint. Near coloration—and I noticed this often at great heights—appeared to have withered inward, leaving a surface dullness of grey, copper or black. The aliveness in my companions and myself similarly seemed to have retreated a little from the surface. We communicated through a denser veil; our contact was more remote, interrupted, as if there were something dusky or crinkled like weeds of mourning-crêpe between our humanities. A poppy seen in a wrenching cold wind can give us the same impression. Its vividness is stricken inwards; its surface is desiccated, shrivelled; its whole energy looks to be concentrated upon the one vital root-clip. For all its grace of resistance we feel that its hold upon life is more brittle, that it is alarmed for itself. If this be the effect of lower Alpine height, how much less in the Himalayas must be the margin of human vitality, how much more difficult that sympathetic communication which makes a mountaineering party stronger than its individuals?¹ At such heights even the surplus energy of youth in its prime cannot contribute to a common reservoir of strength. With every thousand feet gained, each individual core of life must retreat further, contract in self-protection; and a veil of diminishing vitality will intervene between man and man, hindering co-operation. Any high wind or keener cold will penetrate always more swiftly to each lessening heart of life, deadening what remains of energy or will. At such heights, the strongest can climb only upon sufferance; and the conquest of the highest mountains of all, such as Everest, can depend only upon circumstances permitting men of exceptional vitality to use their tenuous remainder of strength evenly and sparingly, to spread it, unhindered by weather, accident, or considerations of time, over never more than gradual and expected effort.

My father and Hereford George had made the first ascent of the Jungfrau from the Guggi glacier, on the north; an ascent considered comparable at the time to the conquest of the Matter-

¹ Written before the Everest expeditions were undertaken.

horn. It had, therefore, to be among my first great peaks, for the threat of the railway to the summit was even then materializing. Elsewhere it is told how Clemenz made a Magic Casement for me with his axe, through the ice-wave upon the summit. The recollection, and the relief, of that view over green and summer levels of lake and plain surprised upon the sudden rim of glaring snow-plateaux and gaunt rebellious rocks, brought me back again and again to the Jungfrau in later years. The squat brown sacks might stand in ranks in the hot snow cwm below the bergschrund, the ice-steps might be worn to a trough by the countless feet of the rail-borne climbers from the Eiger Junction, but the beautiful surge of the snow spire above the Roththalsattel could never lose its fascination, or fail to revive, perhaps more than any other mountain, a little of the atmosphere of fairyland as it existed for the early mountaineers.

Clemenz had to work hard on that first Jungfrau day ; for there were many steps to cut—deep through uncertain snow into hard ice—during the ascent and descent of the shoulder under the Gespensterhorn ; and as we swung in the evening down the whole length of the Great Aletsch glacier back to Belalp, he lagged perceptibly upon the rope. Where the glacier widened out in resentment at its own abrupt end, and the distant line of the Pennine monarchs, from the Weisshorn to Monte Leone, challenged us across the deep break of the Rhone valley, his shrewd eyes twinkled meaningly behind the walnut wrinkles, and he grunted—“ Ah ! you will be going over there soon ; and they will steal you from me ! ” ‘ They ’ were the first-class Pennine guides, with whom he modestly refused to class himself. The prospect of this ‘ theft ’ used to intrude ruefully upon our gossips in lonely huts, or as we day-dreamed among the gritty rocks above the hotel in intervals of rest. But time was the thief, not the rivals he acclaimed so whole-heartedly. He had given me what he could of his craft, and I could not in return give back to him even one of those thirty odd years which flowed between us with such partial tides. By the beginning of each new season they had but increased youth the more with experience, and robbed age of something of its remaining vigour.

But I was indignant, then, at the idea of any such parting ; and when the fairy-godmother waved her wand once again, and translated us back to the Zinal valley—and of course the traverse of the Rothhorn from the Zermatt valley seemed the only natural line of approach for a mountaineer—Clemenz went with me, silent and excited as a boy over the rare escapade outside his own region.

For reassurance, we picked up a brazen-bearded Saas guide on the way, who proved to be only of sounding brass. The little Trift hospice was in ruins, I think, at the time. Anyway, we coursed over the Rothhorn directly up from Zermatt ; and it was a marvel to see how the old 'outlander' flitted unerringly in the lead, along the considerable towers of the north arête. From Zermatt to Zinal we did not take quite six and a half hours ; and it was only when we were safely down, off the dry glacier and upon the long moraine paths, that Clemenz waved brass-beard and myself into a race ahead, and loped philosophically down after us at his own pace, with the long pick of his formidable axe glinting as usual from between his brown shoulder and his brown cheek.

Alone once again in the Val d'Anniviers, I climbed Lo Besso, the Diablons, and some lesser peaks, and wandered, now with greater confidence and profit than before, over the divides into the neighbouring valleys. To one of these solitary ascents, that of the Grand Cornier, I am doubtful even now whether I should confess ; but I will at least not defend it. On the first day I crossed over into the Ferpècle valley, and slept high up on the flank of the Moiry glacier, in a rock nook conveniently close to a bathing-stream. As the sun went down over the crests opposite, the loneliness became too intimate, crowded with inquisitive 'presences' that seemed to be alive and watching just below the surfaces of all the visible forms of rock and hill and shadow. Once again I found that in solitude the nerves are tautened like wires, and that they seem then to be vibrating to impressions too faint for normal hearing or sight, too elusive to be perceptible in company. The little gusts of wind brought an under-complaint of human speech. The falls of the stream babbling near me appeared to hush at moments, as if in order to listen themselves to voices hailing, full of alarm or of recognition, at some immense distance behind or within their own murmur. Possibly because the gîte had been chosen rather for its picturesqueness than for its comfort, I slept but little ; and long before light I was already tracking cautiously up the long glacier, and thence up the peak.

It was a dull high dawn, in a deserted sky, over a friendless view. I was too timid of the danger of snow softening later over the crevasses to delay upon the summit and enjoy the anxious victory. So, when I met the first guided party ascending I was already myself far down towards the col de l'Allée. No wonder they stared, inhumanly, as I thought then. For I came upon them out of the snow-chilled mist in long leaps ; and I was too hoarse with silence to do more than mutter as we passed. Anyhow, it

seemed useless to begin explaining; and I hurried over the familiar pass, and down to Zinal for luncheon.

A short rest seemed to have been earned. In the same village, to while away a like 'off' time, Leslie Stephen had played cricket with Macdonald, a stake and a granite ball; and he could find no one whom he could pay for the broken church-window that came of it. But I could not even find some one with whom to break a window. So I borrowed society from Jane Austen and the pine-trees, and in two days had produced a fresh heresy, that the tint of the purple crocus does not harmonize with the over-green grass. By chance also I solved a mystery: that of the alpinist from the Midi who was seen to leave the hotel every morning in full climbing kit, and to return every night unblemished, rope and boots unsoiled. For, under the same pine-trees, a little farther up my slope, he too lay out all the day. And the restful sunshine which we shared taught me to sympathize with an attitude of mind at which, in more active hours of climbing, I might only have mocked thoughtlessly. The new axe, the nailed boots, even the new coil of rope, were to him scenic properties: they contributed to the atmosphere of his mountain drama; their realism made so much the more actual those imaginary ascents, which both he and I, in our several glades, were tracing in spirit all the day and each succeeding day up the great wall of white mountains that faced us over the green firs and larches at the head of the valley.

And then, on a day, Louis Theytaz asked to speak to me. The Tabins had been, and the Theytaz were, the 'guiding' families of the valley. Louis proved to be full of ambition to profit his valley and his kin by opening up possible routes on to these great peaks round the head of the Zinal glacier; more especially up the Dent Blanche and the Weisshorn, summits which had come to be popularly regarded as in the exclusive province of Zermatt. Louis was a short, sturdy man in the prime of life, of great and supple strength, and with the dark good looks, black curl-crop, and pleasing movement, which a strain of Italian blood, leaking here and there across the frontier, has left as a long inheritance in many Swiss peasant families. I was quite willing to be yoked in some parade capacity to his ambition; and we began by designing a direct route from the valley up to the formidable Viereselsgrat of the Dent Blanche. But it was still only my second big season; and I made the condition that we should first test the partnership in a tour over some of the less exacting, but to both of us unfamiliar, peaks adjoining.

The black sphinx head of the Matterhorn, peering over the silver arc of the col Durand, the flat dark profile of the Weisshorn, the white truncated pyramid of the Gabelhorn, they were, I think, to Louis items in an artistic programme, necessary to add to his repertoire as a professional performer. He was impatient, it seemed, to attempt them, to get them at his fingers' ends for purposes of public repetition. My own feelings about such historic sanctuaries were inevitably different: but their intrusion would be out of place at the start of so breathless a tour.

In the encouraging company of a lady who could play Schumann as he should be played among mountains, we cut long ladders of steps up the treacherous ice wall of the col Durand; and we breakfasted there, in the yellowness of refracted light which fills an Alpine morning when the white groundwork of snow and ice has been blown to dead silver by long winds of frost. To secure our friends on their return down the great steepness of the pass, Louis and I redescended the ice-steps with them, and steadied them with a rope over the bridged bergschrund at the foot of the wall. Then we raced up the steps to the pass once again, galloping to escape out of the numbing northern shadow into the sunlight above. We went too fast; and we both paid the price in stabbing headaches—almost the only occasion upon which I felt disposed to suffer from 'mountain-sickness.' I discovered then first that by stooping the head almost to waist-level and lifting my knees with my hands to each stride I could ease the oppression without checking the pace. On many occasions since, when haste was imperative, the same device has served. For on steep snow-plods, in high thin airs, half the climber's difficulty is that he cannot distribute the effort, share the labour of his legs with his arms.

To rest ourselves, we turned up eastward from the pass, and crossed the beautiful fan-shaped summit of the Pointe de Zinal. This gave us our second wind; and the pass as we looked down on it, seemed too delightful to leave. So we returned to it, made for its western end, and added the nearer summit of Mont Durand to our day. Back once again on the pass, we had all the afternoon and only a downhill way before us. With a softer southern air in our faces we drifted companionably down the fall of the Hohwang and out on to the great Z'Mutt glacier, under the north face of the Matterhorn.

So the great divide had been crossed: for the first time I was inside the main armies of the mountain kings. Back on our right swept the ranked precipices of the Dent Blanche, assembling

symmetrically against the sky into a single ice-tipped spear-head. Across the Z'Mutt glacier fronted us the astonishing shield-formation of the Dent d'Hérens, a lacquer of dark slab and hanging glacier, forcing the eye perpetually outward to the order of its outline. Above us towered the most imposing of the Matterhorn aspects: not the lion rampant of the north-east, nor the upright lance of the east, nor the lion regardant and the lion couchant of the south and south-west—but perhaps more satisfying than them all. For, from the north, the gigantic, curving spring of the Z'Mutt ridge buttresses the leaning height, and gives a sense of massive solidity, wholly reassuring in its balance.

We stumbled across the stone-wilderness of the Z'Mutt glacier, our eyes distracted, and our necks cricked, by the nearness of those stupendous northern crags. We were shunning hotels; and our night's lodging was already visible high above us on the left, the trim excrescence of the hut upon the extended paw of the Hörnli ridge. There was time to spare—and who would mark time at his first touch of Matterhorn rock? We followed the irresistible upturn of our eyes, clambered up the loose moraines under the face, and cut up the ice-cliffs and out on to the hanging shelf of the Matterhorn glacier. There, on the white sill of impossible height above us, we wandered across and felt the actual bases of the cliffs, stared upward into their dizzy recession against the scudding clouds, wondered at everything, and at ourselves, talked disjointedly of the past and—forgot the present. Only when the shadow about us slipped suddenly outward, and down across the lower glaciers, and the icy spear-head of the Dent Blanche burned for a moment total gules in the overpassing of sunset, did we remember that there was, still, the future. We clattered down the ice-cliffs, contoured along the easy, shaly slopes of the Hörnli, and reached the wood cabin upon its slack of loose stones as darkness fell.

It had been arranged that the brass-beard from Saas should meet us here, with food for the morrow and fuel for the night. We had, therefore, already finished off the crumbs of our light provisioning, and we arrived hungry, and chilled by the night-fall of a cold season. But brass-beard had met friends of his own and of the wine-cup in Zermatt far below, and from some cosy chalet of refreshment the weather had seemed to him unpropitious for a morrow's ascent. The hut faced us, close-eyed, and empty. Even the ubiquitous Matterhorn tourists had been scared by the same threat of worsening weather. It was too late for us to descend to Zermatt, and a little snow had begun

to fall. We did what we could, and very crossly. We made firewood of one of the rotting benches; and then, smoked rather than warmed, hungry and thirsty, we crept together into the damp straw for sleep, shivering again as the chill of the raw ice-pack which filled the space under our bunk struck upward through the thin planks.

Day at last broke in upon us through the chinks, with the inverted glare that tells us, even before we look out, that it is shining upon new-fallen snow outside. We crept out into the sun-trickles, and felt cold; and we looked up at the enormous leaning peak with its night-wrap of fresh snow, and felt hungry. But there was a tingle of glowing anger inside us, and we fed with set teeth upon our resolve not to be baulked. I felt that Louis as he puckered his eyes against the sunrise, with a grey handkerchief tied round his grey hat and unshaven chin, was only waiting for a word. And at last I murmured to the wind generally that since we were both there for the first time it did seem a pity to go down without at least exploring the way on to the base of the peak. That was enough. We abandoned our sacks—they were empty—and all loose gear, tightened our belts, and trotted up into a glorious flashing morning, with the mountain before us, and all to ourselves! Louis had not been on the Matterhorn before; but he never made a mistake or halted for the route. We had started as late as the sunlight; and now it blazed torridly to recover its lead, clearing the snow off the slabs just ahead of us as quickly as we climbed. The icy wind lessened our thirst, and the exciting pace left us no time to realize the slower pangs of hunger.

We reached the top in a few minutes over the three hours. The snowcrest between the summits had been frayed into a transparent comb, frigid with wind-whipped ice. From time to time the gusts crashed through the icicles, and scattered them in a metallic rattle down the southern precipices. We sat and sucked long ice-spillikins, and tried to take in the incomparable circle of conflicting view—sheer mountain form and mass, modelled only in planes of light and shadow, yet in hopeless agreement with the colour and atmosphere of valley and Italian distance. The Matterhorn view is more difficult to master than the Matterhorn. I have, on occasion, spent three hours alone with it on the summit; only to find myself at the end still wrestling with new and opposing impressions, and never even able to begin to arrange them in orderly memory.

The pause gave hunger time to overtake us. So we dodged

past it into the quicker movement of descent. Each time I have come down the Zermatt ridge I have vowed it shall be the last. But fate or weather has always been ready to spring some fresh trap-door, and once again I have found myself discharged down it with only the distraction of inventing novel words of abuse to relieve its monotony. It is a jolting, brow-beating, throat-clutching and joint-racking descent, never calling for real climbing but insisting tyrannically upon our unremitting attention. I have come down it when we had to fight for every foot-hold, with a local blizzard raging over ice-glazed slabs; again, when new-falling snow romped after us down the slobbery ledges and, by pouring like a waterfall on to my shoulders, taught me incidentally how insupportable is the weight of even an inch-shallow avalanche; and yet again, when the sun flamed and the rocks blistered our smarting hands, radiating a smother of spiky dust which prickled in the nostrils and lungs.

It was on one such later descent that the Sack Fell. It was a day of shift from sun-roast to storm, so sudden—as is characteristic of the Matterhorn—that the majority of those upon the mountain failed to get down before night. There were some fifteen parties of us descending at intervals down the long ridge. One of the guides in the rear dropped his sack, from the high snow shoulder under the summit cone. Down all the thousands of feet it bounded, swirling past each of our ropes in turn. The contents came out, bottles, tins and round loaves, all cascading and bouncing neck and neck in a grotesque competition. A guide in the lowest party, by repute not a teetotaler, looked up at the clatter, and saw things like trees or men falling. On wings of sensation he sped down to the Schwarzsee hotel, and thence to the valley, to be first with the calamitous news. Never was such a tragedy. Every chalet in Zermatt had some guide-relation on the mountain that day! When our turn arrived to tramp past the Schwarzsee we were engulfed in a crowd palpitant for details. On the lower alps we met an expensive cohort of guides, proceeding upward for the recovery of the fallen. As Knubel remarked musingly to the welkin—"At any rate, Herr, that sack did not fall in vain!"

On other occasions, to vary its wearifulness, we turned this descent into a race, of course with all prudence. My return with Ryan from the Furggen attempt, which I shall be referring to later, was one of these bolts from our own blues, and probably the fastest of them in time. But the hungry urgency of my first descent, with Louis, made it seem at least as precipitate. It

took just over two hours. We fluttered down like air-balloons, buoyed up by the immensity of void within us. Hunger harried us, and brought with it in pursuit seven worse devils of irritability, clamouring to fill the void. When brass-beard poked his head out of the hut at our approach, he may have been prepared for some remonstrance due; but the torrent of indignation that broke over him in two cataracts of unbroken French and very broken German patois, literally swept him in stupefaction off the mountain, and into an oblivion from which he never again emerged.

We ate what he had brought; slept off an hour or two of our arrears; ran down to Zermatt to get fresh provisions; and started off again at dusk the same day up the Trift valley. Because Zermatt I still looked upon as a Mecca: it was only to be entered officially, and occupied, when I should have earned the full mountaineering right. But so long as I did not sleep there, or change the boots of progress for slippers of contemplation, these food-forays in passing did not count.

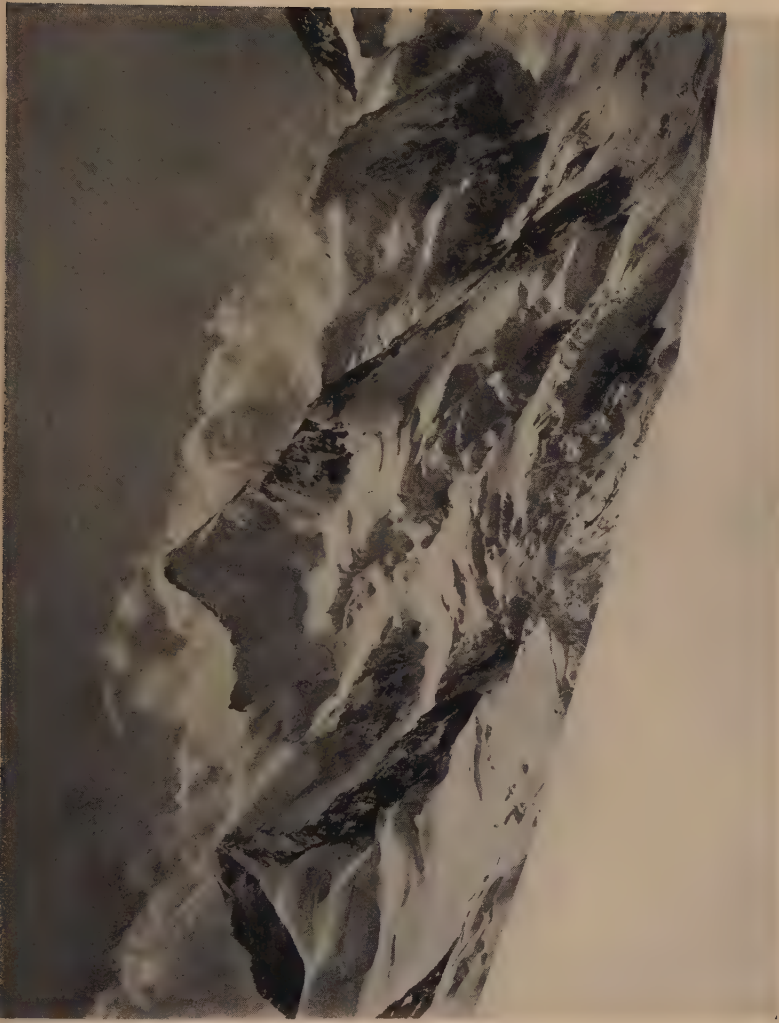
Under a rock at the foot of the draughty moraines below the Trift glacier we passed the first few hours of another comfortless night; and long before dawn we were tramping well up the Trift glacier, making for the end of the north arête of the Wellenkuppe. It is a lively little ridge of sound rock, merging in a miniature snow-crest, and finishing on to a specimen little summit. Sunrise met us there, its light of welcome pinched and heatless in a sneaping wind. This summit, if I remember rightly, is notable for a natural and roomy rock dustbin, into which the generations continue to cast their imperishable empty bottles—a thoughtful provision!

We had spoken by the way of descending along the ridge to the Triftjoch, and so by the glaciers home to Zinal, as a sufficient undertaking on this our third day of continuous pilgrimage. But the mighty ridge onward and up to the Ober Gabelhorn swayed and undulated up the clear sky ahead, shaking a defiant mane of flashing, frozen cornices. Long icicles, pendent from the cornices, multiplied in colour the slanting rays of the sun. Along whole spaces of the ridge—for of course we yielded to the temptation—we were able to scramble up a bare rock rim under the very stoop of the ice: on our right the cold, hollowing wall of the long ice-grotto, on our left its hanging ice-fret, where with every other step our humping shoulders brittled off a shower of baby icicles that had rashly strayed inward from the fringe.

The conspicuous granite fang, or tower, which blocks this arête at half its height, had up to that time not been climbed. Tradition circumvented it. As we approached it, Louis threw many thoughtful side-glances down the precipitous white slopes below us on the right. But on that day they were all of cheerless ice. To follow tradition would mean a long labour of cutting, and a touchy traverse on steep ice-steps; and we were only two, and one of the two an untried ice-man. In the event he preferred to attempt the unclimbed rock; and he set about the tusk-shaped tower mightily. For an anxious ten minutes I clung with two toes in an icy crack, on the slab that sloped into space from its base; and watched his agitated feet dealing doughtily with the sheer wall at a crazy height above my head. Once he had to pause, to let out more rope between us; and then he was up, with a cheer—and my echo of it. I was too interested to remember how I followed him. And then we sat on the sharp point in the sunshine, and ate our lunch, and I took a photograph of the Z'Mutt glacier miles below between my dangling feet: a distorted picture which still preserves my battered boots with their individual edge-nails in exaggerated foreground.

Thence to the white pyramid of the summit gave us hard, quick going; and we were fortunate in finding the 'gabel' between the lower and higher crests free of the terrible 'double-cornice,' so often present and so often impracticable, and which, in a later year, cheated Herbert Reade and myself of the final moments of a guideless ascent. To continue in the same great line of ridge, descend to the Arbenjoch on the far side of our peak, and thence join our col Durand route and descend to Zinal, offered a very fine completion of our three days' circle. The idea had only to be suggested to be adopted.

The Arben ridge was in compliant condition, and by contrast with the first half of our day gave us a soothing variety of descent. One of the chief delights of climbing along high ridges is the continuous suggestion of change and progress. On a peak the mass blocks our view. Our attention is confined between the steadily contracting edges of the wall upon which we are climbing. The summit above us, false or true, suggests to the mind a finite effort, soon to be rounded off. Our purpose, in fact, seems limited to the overcoming of an interruption to our freedom of sight and progress. But the crest of a great ridge stretching away before our feet is an emblem of a happy infinity. Its narrow procession of obstacles serves only to keep us physically



Wellenkuppe

OBER GABELHORN
Northern Face

Mt. Durand

Col Durand

concentrated and stimulated. Its suggestion of continuity offers no obstruction to our thought. On the contrary, it leads our sight irresistibly into distance, our hope into futurity. Along its mounting line ahead of us our eye travels into a widening promise of space. It is tempted forward, as if following upon a fine clue, to always greater imaginative heights; or, upon either hand, it is free to plunge into the depths of discovered glacier and valley. And, as we advance, beyond these deeper glaciers far to right and left the great peaks of parallel ranges serve to register for us a continuous aerial progress. One after another, the breadth of the glaciers descending at right angles from our crest, the recesses in the mountain masses opposite to us, open out, each in turn dominating the view. One after the other they fold up, fan-like, behind us, as our attention passes on; and another glacier or mountain takes their pride of place. Motionless milestones for our progress, these altering views of distant peaks beguile us with a thrilling sense of our own movement through space. By comparison with their vastness the difficulties which we are overcoming upon our thread of ridge seem to sink into an even continuity; and along this bridge-span, high and uninterrupted—in thought at least,—we are borne across an open sky, through an ever-changing variety of mountain revelation.

As we descended upon the Arbenjoch, and Mont Durand beyond and across the pass began to rise above our heads, Louis Theytaz behind me dallied unaccountably. Evidently he had something on his mind. So I called a halt. It then transpired that he disliked the dull prospect of traversing or circumventing Mont Durand once again to the col, or of descending to the glacier by any intervening line from the Arbenjoch. On the other hand, he had long wished to descend the Gabelhorn by the north face—and it was still early in the afternoon! In more discreet years I suppose I should have baulked at the notion of ascending a mountain of this magnitude for the second time, and late in the day, in order to descend it for a second time by a route of some one else's private preference. But then—what did uphill or downhill matter, so long as the hours were filled with climbing of this novel and enchanting excitement, and the eyes filled the while with new sights of these enthralling mountain ranges?

We turned, and reascended the immense succession of rock steps, snowcrests and icy stairways. In the interval the Arben ridge had grown much longer, decidedly steeper, and at half

its height certainly more fatiguing. At moments I even felt a little disgruntled, and decided that glimpses out over the raised map of Lombardy might come, by repetition, to lose their charm. Consequently I reached the summit on the second occasion with even greater pleasure than on the first.

With a cheerfulness of relief we turned down the drooping snow wing of the short northern arête. It inclined abruptly, and the edge was fine-set for balance. But the sun had softened the snow to an easy tread, and the arête ended for us all too soon. There was nothing for it but to turn down off its crest right-handed, and descend as best we might the wall of the gigantic semi-cauldron of snow and ice which sweeps round from the Gabelhorn to the Wellenkuppe. The wall looked to my unaccustomed eyes immeasurably high, unconscionably steep. It is in fact steep and high enough to render the risk of avalanches a very present one for any party ascending it in softer weather. For us the snow stayed hard, too hard. Every step had to be flogged out with the axe; and to fashion descending steps on a precipitous wall is perhaps the most trying of all tasks for a beginner. Louis had to choose between letting me make what I could of the step-cutting in the lead, and leaving me to come down last and unprotected by the rope. It must have given him some matter for thought; for the shadows of late afternoon were now already pointing in angle and curve up the white hollows of the amphitheatre about us, reminding me, as they crept up towards us, of the shadows of moisture that discolour sun-dry sand ahead of an incoming tide.

I smote and stamped all I might for an hour, keeping my eyes on the two feet of snow wall designed for the next step below my feet, and my mind off the further forbidding plunge into perpendicular whiteness and shadow. Then Louis must at last have decided that the risk of benightment on these unrestful slopes was becoming the greater, or that the risk of letting me come down last was proven to be the lesser—I liked to think that it was the latter. For he cut quickly past me, and took over the step-making in the downward lead. Louis certainly got on much faster. He slashed out his steps economically, at intervals it seemed to me of some four feet; and where I had zig-zagged he cut straight down. I soon found that safety on such steps was all I could aim at: correct attitudinizing must wait for easier angles. As I had not yet learned the art of balancing on one foot in a sloping step, and lowering my other leg and myself until my head came below the level of my own bent knee, I

clung on to an axe-hold and slid downward on my thigh from step to step in an ecstasy of caution.

Down, and down, and down the endless wall, with the tumble of glacier and shadows below seeming never a foot nearer. The azurine shadows about us turned to a toneless slate-grey; and on the slanting glacial walls of the Rothhorn opposite the yellow rays passed upwards with the friendly and tarrying farewell touch which often suggests to us at evening that the sun has relaxed its general supervision of ourselves and of the world, and is content to spend some idle last minutes in isolating a picturesque detail or two for its own and our pleasure.

Well above the down-sweep of the lower snow slopes to the great bergschrund Louis swung round to our left across the salient northern angle of the mountain, and on to the rock bosses that extrude from its western flank. It is not the accepted route, but he hoped that the rocks might yield us quicker progress, and at least keep us in the last of the sunlight.

We were making good pace down the steep friable slabs, when, of a sudden, a great flurry of thunder cracked loose above our heads. I had not heard the sound before; but there was no mistaking its menace!—a huge rock-fall was thudding down over the crags. Louis shouted something unintelligible and I saw him cower into the cliff, under an imaginary projection. I saw, too, that the rope between us was swinging across an exposed funnel; and I turned to jump back towards him, to reduce this risk at least. But at the same instant the falling masses began to hoot past us, thrashing the air about our ears with the hideous, pulsating hum of a disintegrating engine. Instinctively, I flattened myself under a shallow step, feeling my body as incompressible and crackable as a hollow egg-shell. The great fragments thuttered and hooted and crashed about us, detonating against the rocks until they trembled continuously under us. And between the thunder-claps the smaller splinters shrilled close across us with a long-drawn fluttering moan that dissolved the bones in anticipation. I felt the kind of helpless terror that humiliates; and yet some smaller part of me kept chuckling all the time over my last glimpse of Louis,—his head vainly probing into a cranny not large enough for his nose, and the grey projection of him bulging up into the sunset. The shattering cascade seemed to last for hours. But the rock where we crouched was steep; the mass of the fall curtained outside us; and only some smaller blocks pistol-cracked on our particular ledges, and spurted into sulphurous dust. For a while after it was past we

still clung there stunned and unbelieving our good luck, while the rent shreds of beaten air—or was it the echo?—still eddied and gulped in our ears : to subside at last into an almost equally shocking silence.

We did not speak. We collected our liquefied limbs in a second's amazement at their survival, and skeltered like scared chamois westward round the face of the cliffs, and out on to the next bay of the Durand glacier, still hunted by the memory of that tremor of disruption. I was to hear its singular frightfulness many times again, when in April 1915 the 17-inchers began to fall upon Ypres, each sounding as it approached overhead like a crazy express-train of fifty carriages hurtling on a spiral through the sky ; and unlike most disagreeable sensations, I did not find that it lost its effect by repetition.

We sped hot-foot down the glacier. On our left as we descended, like an inverted rainbow of reassurance after storm, the perfect curve of the col du Grand Cornier held upon its rim the last redness of the sun setting behind it, and burned above us in an arc of fire suspended between our lower darkness and the darkening sky. But even so, we were not to escape our anti-climax. A historic tendon in my ankle snapped out on the long moraines as we stumbled down in darkness ; and the impression of me rolling over like a shot rabbit sent Louis flying on to the hotel, to announce that I had 'fallen.' Happily an icy glacier stream and twenty minutes of shiver-and-rest sufficed for a cure. And I could stump on, in time to arrest my rescue-party on the doorstep.

As a 'trial' trip our three days had been adequate. The way of mountain action had opened out broadly towards the horizon ; and its widening invitation had begun to absorb more and more of the romantic by-paths which fancy had hitherto followed to the same end. The delight of the rhythm attainable only during long, fast, and controlled movement had come as a new discovery. That which the movements of a game had only hinted at, and brokenly, appeared now as a means of satisfying every physical impulse, of fulfilling every adventurous and unspoken wish. Once the energy of the limbs, and of the restless mind, have found a common expression in that rhythm of great mountaineering, no lesser or separate outlet will content them. Let but our instinct and our physical experience alike tell us that the purpose to which our movement of self-realization is directed is a high and a healthful one, and all the poetry, all the reasoning, all the imagination of which we are capable, will

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fall ungrudgingly into step with our active pursuit, content with such share as may be theirs in the nearer pleasure, and in the remoter success, and unresentful of the discipline by the way.

CHAPTER III

SOME EARLY VENTURES

There is a region of heart's desire
free for the hand that wills :
land of the shadow and haunted spire,
land of the silvery glacier fire,
land of the cloud and the starry choir,
magical land of hills :
loud with the crying of wind and streams,
throng with the fancies and fears of dreams.

THERE are many ways of climbing ; and almost anything that is not naturally flat or artificially smooth can be climbed. Who shall say upon what character of surface, inclined at what angle, and continued to what height, any human climber will find his ideal ? For each of us there is some appropriate kind of elevation, diverging at some suitable angle from the commonplace level, whereon we may be sure of coming face to face with the realization of our best selves as we struggle upward ; and where we may note, if we have insight, how little or how great a distance still separates that fulfilled realization of ourselves from the spiritual heights which imagination can detect beyond. Byron liked a steeple, many undergraduates like roofs, Christina was made a saint for ascending colonnades, R. L. Stevenson enjoyed a haystack, Virgil preferred hills, and made at least one experiment in 'pot-holing.' 'Now, Virgilius,' says the chronicler, 'was at school at Tolentum. Upon a tyme the scholars hadde lycense to goo to play and sporte them in the fylde, after the usaunce of the holde tyme, and there was also Virgilius thereby, walkynge amonge the hylles all about. It fortunede he spyed a great hole in the syde of a greate hylle, wherein he went so depe that he culd see no more lyght. And then he went a lyttell ferther therein, and then he saw some lyght agayne—and then he wente fourthe strayghte !' Many others of us have followed Virgil in preferring the light upon the outsides of our hills. And to these the Alps, built upon a scale adapted to the measure of

a daylight effort and adjusted in detail to the length of the human reach and the limits of human strength, have seemed to offer the ideal range, upon which we might be sure of meeting wholesome adventure, fresh stimulus to effort, and our own least disappointing selves.

No one can expound to some one who has not felt it what the feeling of a belief really feels like. Nor can a mountaineer explain the nature of his enthusiasm to anyone to whom a susceptibility to the atmosphere of hills has been denied. We can only be superficial, and mislead, in a fog of personal assertions. And, as in a fog, the actions and reactions of the one, the sensations of a second, the meal-times of a third, will loom in larger or distorted outline. Or, in desperation, yet a fourth may obscure himself under a cloud of statistics, of heights measured and of 'times' taken:—a fairly large clan this last, of whom Davenant remarked,

Those heights which the dwarf life can never reach
Here by the ways of diligence they climb;
Truth, scared with terms from school, they cannot teach,
And buy it, with their best saved treasure—'time.'

I need not be particular to which order of obscurity belong the stories of a few early mountain indiscretions, perpetrated in the years before we 'found ourselves.'

One of the best of Scottish climbers, A. M. Mackay, and my youthful self, arrived upon a day in a scorching July at the Concordia hut beside the Aletsch glacier; where we devoured ten-franc omelettes, and pledged ourselves anew to a guideless campaign. For, as the result of a comfortable association upon British hills, we had become suddenly persuaded that—

The fewer we are, the sooner it's done.
Two, 'tis true, are better than one.
Two is company, three is none.
Two can never be two to one.

The last line may explain itself to anyone who has climbed alone with two guides, and experienced the out-in-the-cold feeling which their combination can impose. All the same, since the Finsteraarhorn was to be our training walk, we thought it discreet to engage a crabbed but respectable local guide as a chaperon, for our introduction at least.

That ascent, to and from the Concordia, like most guided ascents by ordinary routes, left few traces on the memory. We

were back for breakfast : seven and a half hours sufficing for the traverse of the great expanses of the huge peak, and for the return to the still greater expenses of the small hotel. Our excuses for hurrying were many. There was a blinding drag both ways across the hot snows of the Grünhornlücke ; a tearing wind on the iron-fast summit ridge ; and a glissade from the Hugiattel almost to the glacier, which annihilated time. Above all, we wanted to save as much of the day as possible for a long rest before our guideless campaign. And that at least we gained ; a long delicious lounge on the sun-warmed rocks before the hut, in the heart of that admirable ice world. All day we were within hail of the dinner-bell, and within sight of innumerable parties passing and repassing through the long hours across the laborious white arena, intensifying by their unease our own sense of repose.

The night that followed discovered a new Alpine peril. The catch that held open the only skylight to our loft slipped ; and in the small hours I awoke to all the agonies of suffocation. Fortunately a final paroxysm drove my fist through the glass or the roof—I forget which—and I might have claimed thus to have saved two valuable lives. But, as Mackay slept sonorously throughout, and objected to pay for the roof, I am left doubtful of the value he set upon his own.

We shared then a passion for poetical quotation ; and to our preoccupation before dawn with Shelley's remarks about nature, I can alone attribute the melancholy fact that we found ourselves, with full daylight, ascending the south summit of that treacherous peak the Trugberg, in the cheerful belief that it was our Mecca, the Mönch. The new edition of Ball's 'Central Alps' refers to the 'singular error' of M. Agassiz' guides in mistaking the Trugberg for the Jungfrau. The Trugberg, on the contrary, seems to me to have the inclination and the power to take on the semblance of any peak it chooses. Its derelict drift across the Oberland is a permanent menace to safe climbing, an obstruction to fair traffic as irresponsible and colossal as a motor-bus with a craze for side-slipping. We rushed ill-temperedly down, and began the circuit of that interminable white corridor which under the fearsome title of 'Ewig Schneefeld' leads round the north end of the Trugberg to the Mönch and the Ober Mönchjoch. The season was a singularly hot one, and the snow-sun had by now become unendurable. Its glare was multiplied by a white and woolly steam of mist that swept the bristles of heat against our faces, fractured, refracted and re-

refracted from the snow below and about us, like the excoriating brushes of a revolving knife-machine.

We reached the Ober Mönchjoch with the last of our seven cuticles ; and started the ascent of the real Mönch at an unconventionally late hour. All went well, until we reached the fine crest of snow and ice which leads up to the final peak. Here the snow, which was dissolving in the heat like candle-grease on an oven, proved too insecure to allow us to pass either along its upper knife-edge, or, with safety, upon either of its steep flanks. For a while we proceeded on the Tartarin method, of each kicking his own steps along opposite sides of the ridge with the protectionary rope across the crest between us. On such a day, however, we were aware that every half-hour of advance increased the risks of our descent ; and I will claim a little credit for the fact that, when we were almost up the ridge, with the summit boasting against the dark blue sky only a short half-hour ahead, we clenched our teeth upon our second disappointment, and turned back. With chastened spirits we faced again the white-heat of the unspeakable gallery round to the Mönchjoch, and our glow of conscious virtue as we toiled and broiled along it must be considered to have rather increased our sufferings.

We slithered down from the pass on to the Bergli hut, skewered upon its dizzy rock spit above a seething and scalding of white snow fire, and paused there to debate the serious problem of a descent from it through the afternoon icefall. The unusual heat had had its effect, and the great amphitheatre of the Eiger and the Fiescherhörner enclosing us was trembling with an almost continuous roar of avalanches. Some of these had even obliterated in part the tracks of earlier parties of the day down the icefall below. It was an unattractive choice before us. A night in the hut, foodless and fuelless, we considered only to reject. An attempt to descend direct down the face of the rocks died away in the long venomous hiss of the snow, which slid from us as we touched it and exposed only bare black slabs.

Finally we pulled ourselves together, and dashed out on the customary traverse from the hut into the icefall at a positively police-trap speed, trusting that the lateness of the hour might have shortened the range of the avalanche artillery. Except in a nightmare I have never gone faster and advanced so slowly. We plunged feverishly downwards, with the sprightly cumbrousness of a puppy in a mud-wallow. The snow was of that detestable consistency—liquid conglomerate on the surface and

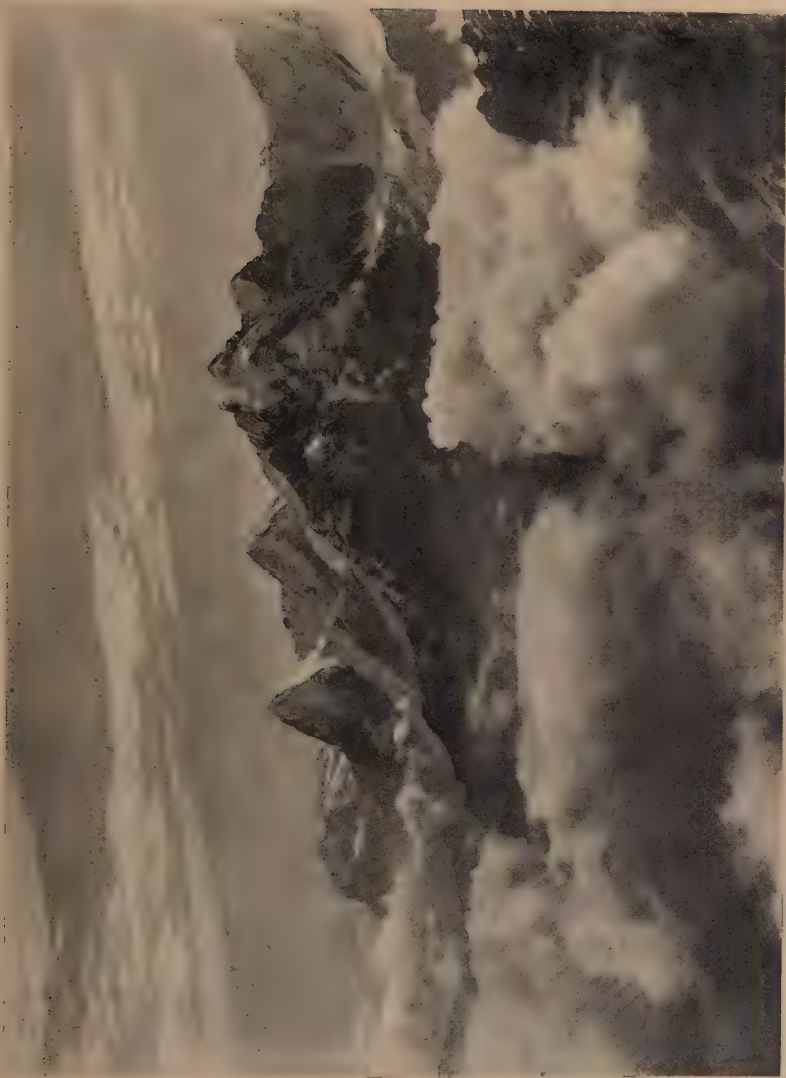
agglutinating conglomerate below. Every dozen steps one or other of us sank to the midriff in the sticky refuse of spent avalanches, and desperately precious moments were lost in cutting out imprisoned legs from their freezing stocks. But we came happily out of range, threaded the séracs successfully, and on reaching the Fiescherfirn were rewarded with a melting, smooth and sloping surface of glacier, down which we could actually skate with long swinging strokes of our heavy boots, as lightly as upon ski.

We accomplished the well-known passage of the Three Bears—the Bergli hut, the Bäregg tea-house, and the Bear hotel—in time to arrange for a secluded dinner in a room darkened to suit our suffering complexions. We borrowed the slippers of the boots as our only attempt at evening dress.

This circuit had been intended merely as a preliminary to our great expedition, the traversing of the Jungfrau from the south-west or Roththal side, usually considered a sound rock climb. So youthfully heedless were we, however, of local topography, that next day we took the funicular up to Mürren, on the wrong side of the Lauterbrunnen valley, in the hope that we might thence be able to work round the head of the valley, at a high level, to the Roththal hut, and so save our legs a trifle of ascent. At Mürren we naturally found ourselves separated by the whole breadth of the valley from our goal. We hunted out a goatherd as porter; and bustled down again on foot, consoled in some sort for the late hour, and for the rain, by the spectacle of a succession of gorgeous rainbows on the clouds and waterfalls below us.

Night, of course, overtook us still far below the hut; and for dim, drenching hours we quested and stumbled over the moraines. It was entirely by good fortune, for the others, that at about ten o'clock one of us ran his head hard in the dark against the corner of the hut itself. We lit our damp sticks with difficulty; and then depression deepened into calamity! By some error our packets of food had been exchanged for a library of Tauchnitz volumes and two heavy wood-carvings. We were faced by a fast-night as an ill preparation for what we knew we should have to make a fast day. Sadly we prowled round the hut, and were rejoiced to discover on a remote shelf a box of condensed milk-tins, left as an advertisement. We dined like hungry men exclusively and thankfully on that yellow, oleaginous and nauseating saccharine.

It was then past midnight, the straw was sparse and moist,



Roththal

EIGER, MÖNCH AND JUNGFRAU

and we were to start at three. Breakfast was not a success. Much tribulation at mountain hotels accustoms us in the end to a midnight-oil breakfast of tepid cocoa, stale bread-chunks and cherry jam, even to the sequel of a black Swiss cigar. But, even on that first morning, the very sight of the condensed milk-tins aroused a sickly repulsion which every later glimpse of the oozy surfaces has only aggravated. We left the porter to batten on the tins, and started with rather hollow exultation up the obvious line of ascent.

So far we had had too much to do, and too little to eat, to attend to the unfavourable weather, and happily there was no professional to call our attention to it. A wet wind, with a shiver in it, assured us at least of respite from rain; but it threatened also a moody prospect of iced rocks to follow above, where we should have to face the effect of the night's frost upon the tears of yesterday. The first passages up the south-west ridge went trippingly enough. Spits of hard snow and a step or two in ice helped us where the rocks were glazed; and the sight of an occasional fixed rope, bedded six inches deep in ice, advised us that we were on the right and much ill-treated route. Then the angle steepened, and the cliffs began to take up the challenge in earnest.

It is a thrilling moment when we realize that we are really at grips with our climb, and that everything depends upon snatching a confident hold. Our peak wrestled cunningly. The glazed rocks, with a rime of frost whitening their chilly curves and disguising their chinks, drove us steadily off what we felt to be the true line. Unwillingly we were forced out to our left, following a diagonal from furrow to furrow up the steep face and searching for clearer rock, or for chimneys where hard snow or a deeper coating of ice should allow of our chipping safe steps. Slowly, and anything but surely, we were driven out on to the great couloir or open face between the west and the south-west ridges. At one time we were so far across that, had the west arête looked less unfriendly, we might well have taken refuge upon it.

The slabs grew more precipitous, glassy and ungenial. More than once as I wriggled up over some bulbous curve I found myself trusting with a kind of angry pleasure to the friction of my rough gloves as they froze by pressure to the polished glaze. The imagination of those who know such places must supply the setting. We were clinging to one starched fold of a vast curtain of precipice, which descended below us into a void

of mist. A scaffolding of huge, unshapely towers juttred savagely above and on either hand through the half-light. A first vibration of grey light was creeping across emptiness against our backs. It seemed to prick out our solitude sardonically : to be pinning our insect-like and chirpy struggles on to the dead bones of stupendous colourless confusion, over the dead heart of still more tremendous silence. Our feelings, too—for this one occasion—may be left to their appropriate type of fog to suggest, in whatsoever distortion it pleases.

As we climbed higher, the two ridges closed in upon us. Until at last we were reduced to a choice between two vertical chimneys, icicle-draped and separated by an ice-coated wrinkle of rock. The left-hand chimney looked to overhang at the top ; so I started up the right, with Mackay in sure anchorage at its foot. At first it went well enough. The walls were smooth, but a wall-paper of ice allowed me to nick steps conveniently for either foot. Some ten feet below its upper exit—above which the angle appeared to ease off in a broad snow band—the ice-papering gave out ; and further ascent seemed vaguely precarious for a climber at the less obliging end of a sixty-foot rope. Our mutual trust contrived in the end a way of escape. Steadied by the rope from my honest but not opulent standing-place, Mackay below me crossed the glazed proboscis on our left into the second chimney, and ascended steadily past me ; until this chimney also went out of business, under another overhang, some ten feet above and well to the left of my head. Stimulated by the slanting courtesy of the rope, and still more by Mackay's never-failing composure, I faced again the bald exit from my own chimney ; and getting the axe fixed above me in a crack, I drew myself up on to its head, and thence clambering gingerly—and at one point literally 'with tooth and nail'—eventually forced myself out over the overhang and on to the ice-slope above. A few strokes of the axe, and I was again on hard snow, where a comfortable anchorage could be excavated to protect Mackay's translation.

The penthouse of snow on which we stood sloped up at a steep angle to the foot of a precipitous rock band, one which, so far as I remember, unites the west and south-west ridges. The sun was now in full and dissolute action, and it was rapidly reducing the snow to the slovenly condition in which we had found it on the Mönch. We trod on its failings with timid consideration, and upon reaching its upper limit investigated the rock band for a responsive flaw. Then, far to our right, we

saw what looked like a cord. Cutting steps right through the snow to the ice we skirted carefully towards it and found indeed a rope, but coated with ice, and dangling over the glazed rocks : doubtless the one which in similar conditions had already been responsible for at least one fatal accident. Back to the left we traversed again, and lighting upon a modest groove clung up it enthusiastically with no more than passing injury to our knees and elbows. These are home-like problems ; such as a climber may be said to honour more in the breech than in the bootnail.

The mountain had now got its shoulders very near the mat. The rocks gave surely back as we pushed upward. We worked to the right, and soon ran up against the last steep snow ridge, which terminates unpretentiously in the Hochfirn. This marked the end of our doubts and difficulties, and of a variation route up the west wall of the peak for which we have, until this day, never claimed the credit of a ' new ascent.'

But we were somewhat fatigued, and in that condition suffered the more, as we are apt to do, from the height and the heat. For all food that day we had the recollection of the milk-tins, the wood-carvings and the Tauchnitz library. I have them still, those four volumes, two of ' Aylwyn ' and two of Trevelyan's ' American Revolution ' ; sustaining reading, but deficient as sole nourishment upon the Jungfrau traverse. The heavier wood-carvings were subsequently dedicated to the annihilation of the Jungfrau railway. Rather heavily we beat steps up the last steep ridge and plodded across the snow plateau of the Hochfirn to the foot of the final wall. Fifty steps and a halt, fifty steps and a halt : a good method, if pedantic. We scaled the wall at its southern end, joined the usual route along the ice-crest which surmounts it, and cut our way with tired arms and light hearts on to the welcome summit. The measure of our exertions may be gathered from my reply when Mackay asked me to guess the hour. I said one o'clock. It was not yet ten.

On the first occasion on which I had reached this summit, from the south, old Clemenz Ruppen, who was cutting the steps up the back of the ice-crest, stopped, to my disgust, with the final point still above my head and shutting out the view. I was anxious to get my first sight of the northern valleys ; and said so. With a grim chuckle he struck the wall above my head. The cornice gave with a crash, and, framed in a window of blue ice of almost transparent fineness, the deep green valleys of Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen flashed into view with the sud-

denness of enchantment, their restful colours seeming to spring direct from the oval window-border of glittering ice, and away to the shadowy lakes and the violet distances of southern Germany.

This time, however, the summit was in more solid humour. We stood upon it, and we saw all the world; while close about us hovered a rake of silver cloud with rainbow-tricked edges, through which filmed and faded a fantastic wind-chase of our own 'spectres.'

The snow had already forfeited our little confidence: what might it not become under longer sunlight? We took Time persuasively by the pigtail, which is the next best thing to catching him by the forelock, and struck down the southern face.

There were no guiding traces; and we swung too far to our left on the open face, instead of following the ridge down to the Roththalsattel, below us on the right. Mackay, however, kicked steps like an ostrich down the very steep snow-slopes, and seemed to relish the long sequences where his axe came again into play. As we descended over the curve of the dome, and could see the lie of the netherland, my recollection revived, and we worked back towards the right. Not far enough, however, to avoid striking the big bergschrund, the principal obstacle on this face, considerably to the left of its vulnerable point which is usually to be found almost on the sattel itself.

But fortune had led us to a spot where the great upper lip had broken away, leaving a loose, lofty scarp of precipitous but not impossible snow. The schrund far below at its foot looked very narrow, and the snow-slopes beyond the schrund deceitfully near. Snow does not help perspective. I anchored securely and paid out rope, while Mackay made a skilful tunnel down the face of the rickety snow-cliff, and only paused where it looked from above to become practically overhanging. I called to him cheeringly to jump, giving him ample line. But he seemed to hesitate, and then, rather to my dismay, proceeded to try and descend still farther down the overhanging lip. As was to be expected, the snow gave, and he started slipping. Our object was to descend, so there was no gain in checking him from his point of view, and I had myself full confidence in his presence of mind. We were neither of us disappointed. When he had reached the last point on his slide at which he could be said to be in actual contact with the wall, he shoved back with hands and feet, and shooting out into space descended on to the soft

snow-slope beyond the schrund with the muffled explosion of distant drums. I was startled to see how small he looked. I was soon to know the reason. Cautiously I crawled down his funnel to the slipping point, and then, craning out, realized why he had temporized. The height was horrific. It was like taking observations from a steeple. However, the rope pointed downward, and the snow below looked consolingly frothy. I threw the axe well clear, and dropped into space. For two hours and a half the white world and all my internal economy rushed up, and by me; and when a projecting portion of the earth at last failed to get past, and roared into me, it seemed like a deliberate and irritating personal assault. My feet hit the snow and my head caught up my feet almost simultaneously, and it is a fact that I knocked off my snow-spectacles with my own boots. In those early days our dimensions were more telescopically adjustable. We picked up our remnants, and marched across the sattel with emphatic sobriety, to re-establish our shaken identities.

The easiest line would probably have been found in a direct descent from the pass to the snowfields on our left. But I preferred to follow my former tracks, and to cross to the farther side of a big shoulder which projects at right angles on this side of the sattel into the Aletsch glacier. The descent of its farther wall proved the least pleasant portion of the climb, and though it is frequently traversed I can say nothing in its favour. The shoulder, an ice wall, curves over smoothly and steeply, and its covering of snow is very disreputably attached in all but excellent weather conditions. A gaping system of crevasses immediately below adds to the discouragement. The snow held, revoltingly, but it did just hold for us; and moving with elaborate care, and cutting steps right through into the underlying ice, we finally landed on the glacier basin with a very conscious relief.

Now, to respond without over-confidence or impatience to an unexpected or prolonged call upon his skill and caution at the end of a successful day is one of the hardest lessons the mountaineer has to learn. The relaxation of his nervous tension induces a jocund reaction. His muscles seem to move irresponsibly, and his mind, no longer concentrated, riots off into a foolish maze of trifles and often of petty irritations. We were, in our own opinion, moderately hardened wanderers. But we came down the snow-covered glacier in what seems to me now a truly Balaclava fashion: and we abandoned the security

of the rope with unseemly precipitance, in our haste to pursue separate steeplechase courses across crevasses and glacier streams down to the creature comforts of the Concordia refuge. The pace and isolation of our several approaches prepared, apparently, the Concordites for the reception of the news of at least two unconnected catastrophes; but fortunately our simultaneous arrival left them no time for the perpetration of relief parties.

Seriously we set to work to obliterate the memory of the condensed milk and to take vengeance upon the tribe of Tauchnitz. And then, in a very different and meditative manner, we set out again into the sunset, and lingered down the dozen miles of glacier towards Belalp, our promised land of cold baths and cold cream. Further I need not follow. The curtain shall fall upon our contemplative and silent progress past the ice-cliffs of the darkening Märjelsee, at the precise, poetic moment when, in Stevenson's words, "We sat again, and ate and drank, in a place where we could see the sun going down into a great field of wild and houseless mountains."

A few days of sun-bathing and of good resolutions followed; reinforced by a tonic course of 'first ascents' upon the Fuschhörner, under the correction of Clemenz Ruppen's satirical blue eye. And then we set out, very staidly, by ourselves once again, to attempt the first ascent of the Lonzahörner; of which only the independent, south-westerly peak had up till then been climbed.

The Lonzahörner stand upon the Beichgrat, in the south-west angle of the Beichfirn, which is reached from Belalp by the Ober Aletsch glacier. They withdraw frigidly, like a black fortification, above the swirl of glacier; and at either end of their jagged wall, on this side, they are supported by two steep buttresses, which prolong their bases downward and outward into the glacier, and enclose a little cataract of icefall.

After a night by ourselves in the Ober Aletsch hut, we tramped up the long firn, and chose the nearer, northern buttress for our attack. A passage over smooth slabs took us off the steep snow and on to the sharp edge of the buttress. Up rocks abrupt but firm we floated uninterruptedly, to the summit of the first peak. The ridge thence to the twin higher peaks was peculiarly shattered, and the narrow mounting wall edge, along which we had to balance, was blocked by a succession of tottering minarets, riven and worried by time and storm.

From the second of our conquered twins we peered over

into the dip between us and the independent south-westerly peak, already previously ascended. We looked down upon a hog's-back of thin, upright plates, with no hold on their edges. The ridge we thought impossible, even to descend. A little later, and we should have known better how to interpret the apparent inaccessibility of rocks, so misleading if viewed only from above. We should have known, then too, something more of the useful art of 'roping down.' But the angle deceived us effectively. And indeed, the flanks of the Lonzahörner, rubbly rock plastered with ice and snow, descending sheer upon the east to the snow plains of the Beichfirn, and sheer and further upon the west to where the green windings of the Lötschenthal lie stippled with flowers and whispering remotely of cowbells, are sensationally upright even for the Alps. We might have returned by the way we had come. But up there in the sunlight, swung upon hammocks of warm rock, we spurned such a course; and perhaps the thought of recrossing our crumbling minarets, with their ice-mortar now dissipating under sun-glare, had some unspoken part in our decision. The more southerly of the two buttresses upon the eastern wall, that parallel to our buttress of morning ascent, sprang from just below our perch in gigantic steps to the glacier; and it offered a bracing alternative.

Lazily we slipped over its edge. Broken at first, the leaning slabs grew progressively more difficult as we descended. As a ridge, the buttress soon lost all definite character. We found ourselves zigzagging down the disconnected accidents of a precarious rock face. We had to run out all the rope between us; and, with Mackay generally out of sight far below my feet, my own moments of descent over the prognathous overhangs seemed dauntingly solitary. Not otherwise might a spider feel as it rambles down the cracks in the whitewash of a barn. We spent two exhausting hours upon the last few hundred feet of descent on to the small enclosed glacier.

Even so we were still far above the desirable levels of the Beichfirn. From a frothy upper rim, upon which we stood, our little glacier strained and bubbled downward fractiously. To skirt along this upper rim back to our buttress of the morning was impracticable: we should be directly under the stone-fall from the cliffs. To traverse the hanging glacier at any lower level looked equally hazardous: the whole fall was a whirlpool of ice-jet and crevasse. Our only hope appeared to be that the prolonged base of our southern buttress, curving over now and

out of sight along the lower side-rim of the falling glacier, might continue to keep some pathway of slab free of the ice waves, and might, somehow, somewhere, see us down to the Beichfirn. We saw it to be a forlorn hope. The kerb of rock, even before it disappeared from our sight, was reduced to a narrow fishback of rounded slab, with the ice-bay it hemmed mounting always higher, and already lipping upon it greedily.

As we descended, the treacherous fishback sacrificed our only chance. Insidiously it bent inward and curved right under the face of the icefall. The glacier-torrent on our left, fretted by this increased obstruction, began to rear itself in frozen waves above our heads. Here and there the wash had flooded icily even across the slabs, and made for us breaches of awkward passage. On our right fell only a darkness of precipice, ice-polished, and undercut far below by centuries of travelling glacier.

Much in doubt, we followed down the rim, which steepened steadily as it hurried towards some plunge into the unseen. And then, with a final stoop of marble-smooth rock, our faithless slab dived aslant in a deliberate header right under the down-leap of the main icefall. We had followed it to the last, clinging rather to hope than to any help its surface offered. And now we hung there, fingers and toes spread upon the crannies, in the late afternoon light, with the ice-crests breaking above our puzzled heads; and we took counsel below our breath for fear of disturbing their poise.

Two courses alone were left to us; and both were bad. We might retrace our grim route to the summit, and descend by our morning buttress. This was a bleak prospect: it would mean a night out on the ledges, tired and hungry, in cold weather. Or we might brave the more immediate danger while we were still warm and fairly vigorous, and battle our way somehow right across the face of the icefall to the base of the northern buttress. It was not even an honest icefall, with distinguishable white séracs and blue crevasses. It was a horrid heaped mass of leaden boils and blains of ice, of rotting, mildewy domes blurred with stealthy grey snow. Its indefinite hollows looked as unsubstantial as its balloon-like swellings.

With my heart thudding in my boots, and weighting my feet dangerously for such fragile going, I crept out among the enormous, deliquescent bubbles, relying chiefly upon Mackay's imperturbable optimism. Never again, except once for a short passage up the all but impassable Fresnay glacier under Mont

Blanc, was I confronted with such incalculable ice. Even the long afternoon crossing of the whole breadth of the icefall of the glacier de Léschaux, on an occasion when Knubel, Gabriel Lochmatter and I had failed in a freak attempt upon the north face of the Grandes Jorasses, seemed a marine promenade by comparison. We tip-toed over boncyns of ice that rang hollow as glass clock-shades. We chipped up bulging cupolas of crystal as large as St. Paul's, where the axe threatened to crack through at every stroke, and an ominous cackle of ice-fragments echoed up to us from immeasurable profundity below our feet. I felt my hair crisping and grizzling at the roots. And when at last we grounded on the solid flow of glacier bordering the northern buttress, it was with the amazed relief of exhausted swimmers, who have let their legs sink at last in despair, only to find them dragging over firm and shallow footing. For the rest of the evening our toes felt so light that it was difficult to keep them soberly down to their stumbling march along the stony glacier, homeward.

The man from Chicago, upon awaking after his decease, remarked to his neighbour that he had not thought heaven would seem so like Chicago. His emotion at the answer may have been that of surprise. But I have always supposed it to have much in common with the feelings of Mackay and myself when, having retired upon Zinal to enjoy a little heaven of rest, we awoke to find ourselves committed, only a day later, to—if I may be forgiven the periphrasis—another and a very different sort of 'clime.' Louis Theytaz and his compeers were ambitious, as I have said, to add among others the ascent of the Dent Blanche to their Zinal province. I had encouraged the idea, because the original route up the Viereselsgrat had never been repeated, and was so far forgotten that a line on to it from the Mountet hut it was supposed locally would constitute a new ascent. In the previous year a final spell of bad weather had driven me home while we waited; and the guides, undeterred, did the ridge by themselves in the next fair break. So it came now that Mackay and I found ourselves cast for the parts of First and Second Tourist on the official opening of the ascent.

It transpired too, that the pioneers were pledged to climb it 'all in all, or not at all.' A portentous caravan of five appealed to our comic sense: it promised to reproduce something of the numerical picturesqueness of early ascents of Mont Blanc. We assembled our battalions, tore ourselves away from the Zinal

tradition of moonlight tea-parties, and paraded up the long gorge to the Mountet hut, with the sunset making an old-time transformation-scene of the circle of stately peaks beyond the glacier.

Moonshine, however, we had calculated upon as our lantern ; and at its first glint over the snow walls our cohorts moved out over the glacier with the tramp of the midnight Assyrian. Clambering upon the Dent Blanche under a dusky moon we discovered to be a mysterious and indiscriminate business ; the more so as two of the guides were principally occupied in propelling the incompetent third up shadowy corners. We gouged, jammed and bunted our way up chimneys and loose angles ; until we emerged, with a pleasant relief of space and air, on to the long north-east arête, not far above its last plunge to the glacier. Our progress up it continued to go dangerously smoothly. The moon paled ; and we began to see one another's faces, in a lemon-tinted unflattering light of dawn, on a little snow col half way up to the start of the Viereselsgrat. There the (supposed) new section of our ascent we knew would end. It was almost dull.

Then the ridge altered, and steepened. It began to puff itself up under the boiler-plate slabs and ice-mail which are characteristic of the Dent Blanche. Again and again we were driven off the edge on to the boiler-plates, and were forced to chip toilsome diagonals of sketchy steps up their grey ice-glaze. On the previous ascent the guides had avoided the ridge altogether, and had traversed continuously up the face well out to our right. Wherefore the ambition to make upon this occasion the first ascent by the 'true ridge,' made me insist upon their sticking to its edge wherever possible.

The point where the east and our north-east ridges join, and continue to the summit as the famous Viereselsgrat, is marked by an insolent shrug of the mountain's high black shoulder. We had to evade the shrug by slabs on the right ; and upon this traverse we took our first halt for breakfast. The severity of the general angle may be gathered from the fact that, at this the most convenient spot for a pause, we were all balanced in shallow ice-steps on the face, while we swallowed jam and sardines from the one hand, and held on with the other to the rope anchored round a few small spikes. The guides started to regain the ridge above the difficult shrug before we had finished ; and so gave us an entertaining view of our third and incompetent guide being literally hoisted by stages up the wall, upon axe-heads inserted in the angles of his awkward person.

So far we had only been seven hours on the way ; and the deceitfully easy gradient of the Viereselsgrat, already traversed two or three times, mounted now before us towards a clear morning summit full in view. We could even see another party celebrating their arrival on the summit by the ordinary route ; and we felt confident of reaching their remnants in five hours at most.

Man appoints, fate disappoints. The ridge looked demure, arched its spines, ruffled up its cornices, and joined issue with an ingenuity that seemed of design. Turret after turret, and spire beyond spire, as we advanced, revealed itself as a disconnected defence upon the narrow and continuous-looking crest of our ridge. Wherever we tried to turn a flank to right or left, slides of impish glaze and snares of green icicle choked every helpful wrinkle. Between the towers the unexpected gaps were spanned by malignant cornices, which wavered high above the rock edge they concealed, and left to us only the choice of swarming beetle-fashion along their shapely but frail convex backs, or of, even more precariously, tunnelling along under the break of their crests. After turning the base of one unassailable tower, we could only regain our arête by creeping up a wall of dilapidating stucco mixed with ice. Our ' third ' here tugged at my rope, and murmuring with pathos—" Ah, there is one of our dear old fixed ropes !"—pointed at a sponge-bag string bleaching below the ice in an entirely useless situation : there may be safety in numbers, there is seldom sense. One section of cornice, perhaps thirty feet in length, took our leading guide some twenty-five minutes to overcome. He had to work along the concave face of snow under the overhang of its crest, burrowing leg- and arm-holds, and hanging free by one arm the while from the shaft of his axe driven in above him.

As the day wore on, the patience of the weather began to wear out. Fitful spurts of cloud and snow-flake made more sombre the already oppressive conditions of the climb. But a return was not to be thought of : we were already too deeply engaged. It had become a stubborn fight to a finish ; and on the long hazardous traverses up the slabs the knowledge that each of us had only his own sureness of hand and foot to rely upon had a very bracing effect.

The mountain contested every step ruggedly ; and memory retains few details of the incessant struggle. But one incident is recorded in a flashlight of keen sensation. We were moving with delicate precaution along the whale-back of a great hum-

mocking cornice, enveloped in grey mist, cutting our line of steps quite twenty feet below the rounding profile of its crest above us. All of a sudden, with a harsh tremulous sob as perceptible to the eye as to the ear, the sickly white wall looming behind, above and before us—and upon which we were standing—went out, like a candle. A bottomless depth of dark noise yawned into sight and hearing under our feet. Consciousness, momentarily suspended, returned with the up-roll of thundering echoes and at the glare of confused avalanches shattering down the discovered precipices to the glacier many thousand feet below. It took a long instant to realize that a mass of overhanging cornice, a hundred feet long and in parts thirty feet across, had broken away along the line of our steps. Half my left boot projected foolishly over nothingness; my axe had been snatched from the fall by the clutch of instinct. Mackay, in steps slightly higher up on the wall, saved himself by leaping outward to the right, alighting neatly again upon the raw new edge of the snow-fracture. The rest, in their steps ahead, had been, by good hap, below and clear of the line of cleavage. It is, perhaps, significant of our dogged and already somewhat forlorn state of mind that no word was spoken; and that we battered on in a resigned silence. I recollect only thinking—"if this 'dent blanche' crumbles in such fashion, it must take some stopping!"—as we set about the next difficulty.

The summit had now been long out of sight in the mist: a broth of grey haze, into which snow-pinnacle and cornice before and behind us were plunged, appearing and disappearing through it uncertainly. A shifting vapour between our eyes and the snow under our feet and hands made even the sense of touch unreal. We seemed to be climbing upon an unstable blend of cloud and cold. There was a numbing cruelty in the unsubstantial feel, even of rock; savagery in the shocking steepness of the depths on either side; a cruel expectancy, above all, in the soundless, sightless frigidity of space surrounding us. Each of us climbed for himself, isolated by the frost-fog without and within; and, speaking for myself, I felt extraordinarily alone. The vibrations along the snow-kinked rope alone kept us in any touch.

I know we reached the summit at last, because we got there. But I can recall no special moment in the long hours of later climbing. Each moment had its anxious preoccupation; each preoccupation yielded its full space to the next; and they have cancelled one another out in recollection. We were not

even properly surprised when the end came. Looking back now upon them, collectively, the chances and the conditions would seem to have been greatly against our succeeding. If we overcame them at the time, it was by the only method possible in difficult mountaineering, by defeating them in detail and in their order, making always sure that one more safe step should follow upon the last, and so, one by one, cutting out the seconds of safe passage from the mass of threatening hours ahead.

But the traverse along the Viereselsgrat alone had taken us nine hours. It was no weather for a night out in a snow-wallow. So we stood about on the summit for no more than ten minutes ; and then lined up for the descent, by the southern crest.

Evening hailed our down-turned faces with a cheer of wind. The clouds so long enveloping us sank before it, leaving only troubled grey lakes in the valleys and in the bays of the cliffs. The sun saw us at last ; and set itself gallantly to fight off our common enemy of darkness with an indescribable splendour of attacking colour. Long swords of tawny, purple and crimson flame wheeled in an arch upon the horizon, and stabbed the on-coming gloom into islands of angry hesitation. The lakes of mist caught the reflection in a rose-light of dying ashes. And for a long moment each of us saw his own 'spectre' in full-length shadow upon the cloud-surface, encircled by a rainbow coronet. All too soon the inspiriting colours faded into quieter tones, and then into uneven shadows. The after-glow, a quivering green radiance upon the higher snow, opened suddenly, and as suddenly closed upon twilight ; and night took up against us the battle which the mountain had all but abandoned.

In the meanwhile we had made very rapid and rather contemptuous tracks down the usual ridge, towers, and slopes towards Ferpèche ; and we were well off the rocks and on the upper hanging glacier by the time the tardy night had come fairly into line. Here we paused to light our lanterns. The guides were sleepy, and the process involved a lot of aimless circulation. If five men on a long rope really allow themselves to become entangled, the result is insoluble in Euclidean space. The little lamps danced furiously round each other in the darkness, in a mazy fiendish can-can, to the accompaniment of three separate monotones of patois curses. Laughter held the rest of us helpless ; and it was some time before the suggestion of a general disropeement could be made intelligible.

Then the guides took their revenge ; for in a conscientious search to find ' old ' tracks down the icefalls they forced us to plough wearily across invisible snow-slopes, almost to the summit of the col d'Hérens, and many heavy uphill miles out of our course, before some kindly traces revealed themselves to our farthing dips.

We were all now somewhat languid, and any gush of amiability had dried out of our small-talk. Inertly we plodded down the infinite glacier. Dimly I seem to remember sinking once to the armpits in a covered crevasse, and hearing again below me that musical tinkle of breaking crockery which seems to be mocking at the shadow-kicking of our boot-soles. The glacier path which followed wound another long march towards eternity. Mind and body went uneasily asleep, to the rhythmic beat of our boots. The length of the path and the elusiveness of the inn were my only thoughts : thoughts that grew monstrous with their reiteration. They clanged like deafening bells in the brain. I believe we occasionally spoke ; but thought was so resonant that I sometimes felt unsure whether I was speaking or thinking, and I caught myself once or twice finishing a half-thought aloud. But I do not believe Mackay noticed anything unusual ; and I have no recollection of any remark of his being much more to the point.

When we reached the inn the door was, not very surprisingly, locked. One guide tried the handle, but was so overcome with the disappointment that he sank asleep on the doorstep. Mackay showed the resourcefulness of his race. I can still see him, swinging his axe heavily in the moonlight, and battering with sleepy monotony and fearful animus upon the groaning panels.

We were cordially welcomed, and only besought, after all this clamour, not to speak too loud and waken the children. We hauled in the sleeper ; and a second guide fell asleep beside him across the table. It was then past three in the morning. We had been climbing continuously for twenty-six hours, with only half-an-hour's halt in all, and we had been for practically all that time in very exacting circumstances for muscle and nerve.

Youth, however, is its own tonic. At nine the same morning Mackay and I were tramping down the sixteen miles to Sion, leaving the guides to their much-needed beauty sleep. At the fall of the valley, Mackay, with snow-blindness and the journey to England before him, caught the post-cart and joined the pleasant memories. While I sat down and steadily ate out the

hotel and the village, until the cool of evening and a mulebarrow wafted me down to Sion. The railway along the valley and the ding-dong up to Belalp on foot, in darkness and in one of many 'shortest times,' brought me back to earth. But, for me at least, it was to a part of earth where there were still great mountains in sight, and in prospect.

CHAPTER IV

FINDING THE WAY

Seek them, ye strong,
the cold of morning and the mountain wind.
Through sun and whispering spray
there lies one open way
for manhood still to find
the lamp of vision and the river of song :
seek them for truth, ye strong.

HUMAN bodies are built to function at their best some at higher, some at lower levels: a prosaic matter of circulation and of different atmospheric pressures. The Alps taught me that I belonged to a species which began to breathe more freely and to think more clearly above two thousand feet. Above five thousand feet I felt that I was living intensely. Between eight and fourteen thousand feet the tide of life flowed with a vivacity never imagined in the plains. Memory, otherwise a fickle lantern, burned there like a bonfire in the wind; thought raced; decision quickened into action. A new self lived 'up there'; and mountains which were its 'onely begetter' became in this way invested with a feeling of at-homeness, no matter how unfamiliar might be the individual peaks at the time in sight. Any attempt to give a long name to this relationship would have scandalized me in those days; I should have repelled it with a week of acrobatics. The coming of the at-home feeling I accepted as a natural change, which took place in me, and presumably in all mountaineers, above certain heights—in so far as I recognized it as a feeling at all.

Independently, as it seemed, of this physical change, the Alps in particular could discover for me in myself at times a singular impression, which I came later to call the 'bead-on-the-string' feeling. This was not the usual sympathy which a mountaineer will feel with all historic ranges and their inhabitants—a sympathy due, perhaps, to reading or to inherited memory. It was an impression that behind the shapes of the peaks, within the smell of the high glaciers, through the feel of the snow and

rocks, some impulse was expressing itself which my nature shared, some familiar but formidable atmosphere was maintaining to which I also properly belonged. I could only compare this feeling of 'response' in myself to the sensations of a bead—supposing a bead to have sensation—which had thought itself to be swinging about at its own sweet will; and then discovered, from its moments of experience when the thread upon which it was strung tautened in certain higher atmospheres, that it *was* strung, on a string and through the heart. During such moments the bead would thrill unaccountably to every quiver of the tightening cord; and the vibration of the cord itself, the penetrating sense of my community with these heights, would seem at one and the same time to form part of myself, the bead, and yet to be linking me—either way—with an infinity of such experience, through the tiny measure of its occupation of the bead-life.

In a double sense, accordingly, I felt that I belonged to these mountains, and that they belonged to me. It remained only to exercise the proprietary right. But—and exasperatingly—the ways of asserting or of exercising the right had to be learned, as it seemed, all over again. The mountain-lover may be born so: the mountaineer has to make himself so. A man might feel much as I did who had been carried off as a child from his native country and speech, and who returned to them in later life. The look of the country and of the people would be strange to him, but familiar. The talk would sound homelike and appeal to something forgotten within himself; but the precise meaning of the words would elude him, aggravatingly. His impatience, as he set himself to master again syllable by syllable the language which should allow him to communicate and enjoy his sense of kinship with his surroundings, would be not unlike mine, as I set myself to learn the ways of safely climbing these mountains, of possessing the country to which I belonged, of which I knew the story in detail, and where the shapes, the silences, the friendliness and the hostility alike were felt instinctively to be, and always to have been, my own kingdom.

None the less, even at the beginning I think I knew that, hard and long as I might practise to deserve my rights of mountain ownership, and widely as I might extend an intimacy with the surface difficulties and dangers of the Alps, I should remain to the end the bead on their string. I might conquer the separate peaks; but I should never succeed in controlling, even to the extent of understanding, the relationship sometimes cordial,

often the reverse, which linked my climbing activity upon the vibrating cord of mountain inspiration.

Mountains stay the same. The love of mountains stays the same. But the ways by which we climb mountains must be continually altering if the craft of mountaineering, as distinct from the liking for mountains, is to retain its freshness and charm for succeeding generations. Human courtship demands obstacles. Where the resistance is not great enough to enlist the whole effort of the will and of the personality in the pursuit, the reward is proportionately less appreciated, and the romance of the adventure is less enduring.

Before our coming, at the end of the last century, all the great Alps had yielded to our predecessors. Our generation could read of a mountain, or see it through a haze of distance, and still perhaps imagine the elf-lamp glowing on its summit. But on a nearer approach, at the trite comparison of the well-remembered descriptions with the visible details, and still more as the consequence of some easy or monotonous ascent, the lamp of imagination died down like a wood-fire in direct sunlight, and the adventure paled into commonplace.

It was accordingly natural that the feeling of hero- or mountain-worship, youth's most peculiar and most agreeable instinct, should seek to protect itself and its crusade. I can recollect no express intention of climbing old mountains by new ways. But with the sight of each single splendid peak there would come also a reluctance to inscribe the fresh admiration which the sight of it inspired upon dogs-eared rock passages or time-smudged snow margins. A new rival for the mountain's affections might surely ask for a fresh page for his moving declaration. By one who was not wooing the obvious favours of mountain beauty but the very spirit within each summit-form, no detail, in short, which might be either prejudicial to his suit or contribute to the liveliness of the mutual romance might be overlooked.

To ascend every fine mountain by an untrodden way became therefore very early a precautionary instinct rather than a design. Later, and equally without deliberation, I made the discovery that this sense of novelty or of uncertainty might be recovered in other ways than by making variation routes. The variety might be introduced at the human end. To climb alternately guided or guideless; now with a companion who shared more sensitively the feelings aroused by a climbing day; now with one whose greater technical skill left me the more free to appreciate the feelings undisturbed—these were variations in the personal

atmosphere which could keep the romance of mountain adventure always, and equally, new.

The period of these experiments in relationship, instinctive rather than purposeful, was a long one. For a season the distractions of difficult new ascents would prevail, ascents only to be achieved with the help of skilled but unimaginative guides; because the charm of climbing alone, that short-cut to undisturbed impression, lasted for always shorter and shorter stretches of the mountain-way as the risks of high mountains became better understood. There would follow a season of reaction to the greater freedom of fun and feeling shared by a company of good friends; when our own shortcomings could restore even to ordinary ascents the desirable adventurousness. In the end I was to find that my own road to satisfaction lay through a combination of the two. The gateway to the poetry of adventure opened for me not far short of the borders of physical possibility. The companionship that could bring me to that point in safety, and yet not jar with the pleasant world of feeling that lay beyond the gate, had to be at once technically expert and at least sympathetic enough to keep quiet. And then—that point safely reached and in harmonious company—sometimes even for long hours together when the machinery of the body was working at its best with the senses all in accord and alert, the vibrating cord would tighten or the gate open—whichever image you please—and through beauty of sight and sensation and through a delight in being alive almost painful in its vividness there would throb the conviction that all was very right with both worlds, all very right with myself, and that they were all one and the same thing, and indistinguishably happy.

In one such early reaction towards unshackled feeling three of us fought sloth at Saas Fee for a hot, unwholesome summer week. The Mischabel range sat heavily upon our heads; and there was some stale poison in the airless hollow. Once and again we broke away, as far as 'Clara's' coffee-booth beside the glacier. Levi and I even raced along the Egginergrat and made a fancy climb over the Mittaghorn in a longer effort to shake off the oppression. To escape once and for all we determined to cross the Süd-Lenzspitze or the Nadelhorn to Zermatt. But our last energy barely sufficed for the lesser passage of the Alphubel-joch.

Those endless slopes and undulations of featureless snow! To throw one's weight upon a foot, never certain when the

surface-resistance to it will begin, to stumble through to the ankle, the knee or the thigh, to regain balance by a sharp contortion, to set the next foot with a weary uphill swing, to feel that foot in turn subside into exhausting futility simultaneously with the wrench that fails to extricate the leg behind—it is a torture of thin-drawn-out despair more ingenious than any devised by the ages of persecution. By these half-assurances and half-resistances the whole hope and the whole strength are entrapped at each snow step into an undignified dissipation.

Glaring and misted snowfields can have a debilitating effect that still awaits its satisfactory explanation. So that although there are days on snow when every floundering pace is an acrid delight, when we hurl ourselves at the interminable prospect, plug in, plug out, with a clenching of the teeth, defiant alike of the hundredth or the thousandth penitential convulsion, yet there are equally days with nothing to distinguish them in the quality of the snow, when our bones grow unstable as tepid water, and our spirit wails within at the thought of even one more stride. Why this should be so, why a certain relation between the conditions of snow and light and climber should produce at times this odd enervation, I never discovered.

A hundred steps and a halt, in funereal sequences, we crawled and grunted; and the white, wilting snow swam yellow under our jaundiced eyes. Fifty steps and a halt, as we grew more flaccid. And at last, twenty steps and a halt, numbered aloud, to focus our fibreless despondency upon some finite point in that waste of negative whiteness. Slowly the black lion of the Matterhorn and the glistening pyramid of the Weisshorn rose to meet us, over the white sag of the pass ahead. They were traversed by wisps of cloud, which looked a dull grey by contrast with the blinding snow. It is the privilege of these two peaks to reveal their perfection progressively. They grow more admirable the greater the height from which we survey them. From us that day their appearance struck the last whalebone of self-respect. Gelatinously we collapsed upon the pass; and as I looked at my two friends I could not believe they had ever been vertebrates. They lay like brown smudges scorched on the snowy sheet, or like scarecrows with the sticks withdrawn.

Very slowly, in the pass wind, a third-dimensional bone here or there again took form; and we sat up. In the course of a two hours' lunch we recovered speech, and some broken ends of vitality. Energy for the descent we borrowed from the sight of several guided parties flapping past us. The dejected

tourists trailed in the heat between the mechanical boredom of their guides, and they looked round with a lack-lustre envy at our liberty of sloth and shameless abandonment. Our time for crossing a pass which we never referred to afterwards except as the 'all-feeble-joch' was seventeen hours, and it can seldom have been exceeded.

The Zermatt peaks woke us up—it is a way they have. We no more than breathed upon the shopwindow-panes of the main street, and set off determinedly across the Furgg-grat, hoping to traverse the Matterhorn from the Italian side, and, possibly, to attempt its then unclimbed southern face. At Breuil we engaged Henri Carrel, as 'porter,' and frolicked up to the Italian hut in a thoughtless fashion that appeared to deepen Henri's natural gravity. I have never succeeded in passing a good night in that Italian hut. A gurdy blizzard broke over us. The stove was blown out. The floorboards drifted deep with snow. We cowered all night, kept awake by the freezing cold; while the hut, shuddering like a sick bird on its stupendous perch of crags, ruffled and boomed and cracked at its moorings, threatening to whirl off with the snowflakes, and with us, into the reverberating blackness over Italy.

In the arctic light of morning our unshaven faces and woolly helmets crackled grey and stiff with icicles. The rock towers as we returned down them crashed metallically with the ripping of the ice-sheets upon the wind-gusts, and we took two and a half hours to crawl like disconcerted caterpillars down the slabs up which we had flitted in butterfly-fashion, and in twenty minutes, the evening before.

Arrived upon the col du Lion, the great couloir descending from it on the south tempted us with partial shelter and a fresh invitation of bridal snow. I voted for its sensational glissade, the first of three glorious descents I owe to it. Mummery has told us of the delights of this couloir, once for all. When it is in right snow condition I know nothing to compare with it. We are penned between dark walls under some of the most tremendous precipices in the Alps. The swoop down the widening ribbon of satiny snow vibrates under our soles, thrumming upward through us upon every nerve of pleasure. In glissading the sense of pace almost literally sings in us, chanting within our ears, sounding from under our travelling feet. When the waves of following avalanche flicked too closely at our shoulders, we leaped out to one side, watched them foam past us, and jumped in again behind, to swoop downward once more on the yet

smoother satin in their wake. Then, as on each later occasion, the slow-up on the little battered glacier at the foot of the couloir met us with a smothering feeling of sudden arrest and of frustration.

Clague must have left us for a time after this ; for the next clear view is of Levi and myself dangling our legs over a sundusty bracket on the curve of a vast indeterminate ridge which mounts from this same small glacier to the Pic Tyndall, the lower of the Matterhorn summits. It had seemed to us absurd that this southern wall of the Matterhorn should never have been seriously attempted ; and indeed our ridge of that day's adventure has since been climbed. But we had started too late from Breuil ; and for this reason we discovered all the sooner the reason for the long neglect. Loose rubble littered the immensity of broken cliff. And the stones early began to ruckle over and past us, down the rocky troughs. The discontinuous, rounding bluffs gave us but scanty protection ; and although the actual climbing was not difficult, it was promiscuous and slow, and all the more exposed to stonefall. So, at about a half of the whole height of the rib, we were semi-sheltering in our eyrie, and taking counsel. To press on and upward into the unknown must mean a risky day, and might mean a discomfortable night out. It was not appropriate to our time of life to resolve to stay where we were. These must, I suppose, pass for our reasons in deciding to come down. Probably simple funk, of the height, of the exposure, and of the largeness of the unfriendly cliffs influenced us quite as much. Often since then, in passing to and from between Zermatt and Breuil, I have traced out our failure upon that cheerless and chaotic mountain wall. Sometimes it has been with a little suppressed exultation in our youthful impertinence, and always with a heartfelt appreciation of our luck.

A day later, it was the same two of us who started from the Weisshorn hut, and made a pass across the lower east ridge of the Weisshorn. It gave us joyous snow work ; and appeared a very obvious line. Many years were to pass before I learned that our crossing had come to be accepted as the first at that point, and that one of our names had been attached to it. We came down on to the higher basin of the Bies glacier, a lonely upper chamber in the ice world, of which we were to have more experience later during our attempt upon the Weisshorn north face. An enchanting afternoon across the arctic recess, over the Bies pass and thence by the col de Tracuit to Zinal, completed a long day of happiness on firm snow. We could only

laugh as we sat upon the successive snow saddles, and recalled the odd misery of that other and recent snow day upon the Alphubeljoch across the valley.

In Zermatt we were still rovers, with no attachments. But in Zinal a link of gratitude bound us to the guides. With Louis Theytaz in charge we went up for a crossing of the Rothhorn in the reverse direction to my former passage. We proposed to follow the whole Rothhorn ridge down to the Triftjoch; but slabs frosted like Christmas cards and a wild south-wester denied us all but the summit and a conventional return. It is remarkable how seldom we had to reckon with weather in those years. For a fine climb we used to take a fine day for granted. The demoralization of snow-heat seemed our principal enemy. Ill weather there was, as on this day; but it was the exception, and we made little of it. Doubtless because of this very discouragement it troubled us the less often, and the less hinderingly when it came.

Perhaps it was this south-wester in the Pennines which sent me skirmishing back to Belalp. Clague reappears there as my solitary companion. It was then that, in a blaze of day-long heat, we panted up the great monolith on the Fusshörner, reviling the clammy constriction of our putties—only to find that we had been anticipated by one day. Then, too, that during the first ascent of a famous little crack up the face of the Hohstock, we had to wriggle up a lizard-funnel inside the cliff, breaking off with our shoulders large, amethyst-clouded crystals. And I still feel the relief of coolness which was ours when the rocks removed a part, and forced us to remove all the rest, of our sun-baked clothes—except our vests—as a preliminary to screwing ourselves out through the tiny flute-hole at the top of the quartz funnel.

The good weather spread abroad. A summons came from Louis Theytaz that now if ever was the time for our attempt on the west face of the Weisshorn; an ascent which was to complete our programme of opening ways from Zinal on to all the great mountains dominating the valley. The fairy godmother's vicarious enthusiasm held out, although twelve o'clock in September had already sounded for the end of our season.

Two nights and an exasperation of days Louis and Benoît Theytaz and I dawdled through, in and about the high herd-chalet on the Arpitetta alp. The days we passed in watching wisps of the blind wet mist silking through our legs, in playing tip and run with the speechlessly shy herd-boys, and in gasping

dives into the little tarn just below, an even icier lash of waters it seemed than the Märjelsee itself. Ill nights we lingered through in dozing on the mud floor, dodging the spits of rain through the roof, and in munching doles of black bread dolloped with viscous cheese hot-melting from the smoky wood-fire. Another and, at last, a clearing day we spent high up on the north bay of the Weisshorn glacier, under the western face, cutting steps through the icefall and preparing our way for a final to-morrow.

The night before the attempt we sheltered, for the second time, in an old, cold burrow of grey stones beside this glacier. The ice-damp oozed up through the floor stones, a glacier wind piped for us through all four walls at once, the stars gleamed down on our faces through the honey-comb of the unassuming roof—and I slept but little. The morrow's attempt cast, as usual, a shadow of gravity before it. The three previous ascents of the mountain from this side had left a vague and apprehensive tradition. Passingham's strong party and the whirlwind combination of Farrar and Kederbacher had been forced to spend involuntary nights on the slabs: Cornish's adventures were more diverting to read of than to anticipate: young Winkler's almost legendary exploits had ended there, in a mystery of solitude. Another small detail also contributed. So much of my own time had been spent with German-speaking Swiss, on the hills and in their homes, that the Teutonic dialects remained for me always the home-language of the Alps. As a matter of habit the Frankish tongue of my present companions never came to sound so sympathically in a crisis, nor seemed to me to respond so inevitably to the mountain mood. Altogether, I felt a little lonely.

We set out in a dusk that shrank into darkness between cold trails of starlight. In spite of our exploration we lost much time in the icefalls; and it was broad, frosty morning when we scrambled over the bergschrund, and up a mammoth brow of ice on to the rounded lower end of our chosen rib. From the great Tower upon the north ridge of the Weisshorn down to the glacier this rib descends over a welter of slabs. It might be compared to a petrified giant snake, hung by the neck to the tower above, with its tail whipping out upon the glacier below.

With an impetuous wish to take my share of the work and husband the guides' energy, I insisted upon leading at the start. For a time we made rapid progress. The night-hoar upon the rocks grew less as the sun mounted. Our hopes rose high as



Rib and Tower

WEISSHORN
Western Face

Schallihorn

we swung out to the left for a space on to a helpfulness of frosted ledge and snow patch. But the scale and the perversity of the colossal slabs which form this aspect of the Weisshorn soon hunted us back on to the rib. The higher we rose, the fewer grew the opportunities for lateral escape or for making turning movements. The snake-back too, upon which we were confined, steepened and stiffened progressively. Time and again the dislocations in its vertebræ looked as if they were about to prove insurmountable. After several such passages had occurred in succession, where the backing-up of the second man had been indispensable to the leader, we altered the order. In close combined climbing guide and guide co-operate better, from custom, than guide and amateur, and the Theytaz brothers complemented one another admirably. So we swung the rope round, with Benoît in the lead and myself at the tail. To compensate me, I received Benoît's sack and, later in the day, Louis' also. I had not yet learned the expediency, when I climbed with guides, of carrying nothing in my own sack, so as to be able the more cheerfully to face the inevitable moment when their sacks began to accumulate on my shoulders.

For a time now my field of vision was limited to a few precipitous feet of blistered grey slab ahead. Occasionally Louis' boots and well-filled stockings intruded upon it, gracing invisible notches near the upper rim of my picture. Then there was a pause; and I had time to look up, and take breath.

We had reached the foot of the great 'step' or dislocation in the spinal column of our ridge which we knew was to be the crux of our climb. Many a time we had examined it from below, through many kinds of glasses. A great grey wall shot up above our heads. The edge of our rib, as it flung itself up against the face of this wall, was hopeless. But the telescope had suggested that, round below on our left, up the vertical angle formed by the junction of our rib with the grey face, a crack or at least a corner might offer some hold. We looked; and spied a ledge of traverse slanting down off the round of our rib, and across into the vertical angle. It was a ledge of crumbling chips, cemented with ice; and it had to be refashioned for the feet with the axe. But half-way along it there was good anchorage behind a split block, and yet another sufficient standing-place where the ledge ended in the corner.

At the split block I took a double turn with the rope, and waited; while the brothers traversed further along the ledge and into the angle. There was, however, no crack there. The

corner was a right-angle some forty feet in height, enclosed by smooth walls, and blocked at the top by a projecting drum of rock. For half the height of the corner Benoît climbed encouragingly. Then the holds gave out. Louis followed him up, and straddling across the wide angle on unseen footholds, with very remarkable balance and strength he succeeded in giving his brother foothold, first upon his shoulder, then upon his head, and finally upon his axehead, hoisting him aloft at the full stretch of his arms. Benoît was now within touch of the projecting drum. He was clawing for hold upon it, and further round it on the sheer right-hand wall of the corner. Twice he swung himself off the axe-head, holding by one hand, grunting and kicking,—

But ever when he reached a hand to climb
One stayed him : Climb not, lest thou break thy neck !

and twice he slithered back on to the axe. A third time he flung himself upward with cat-like agility. I shouted my admiration from the standing-room-only gallery, as I saw him swarm over the edge, and jam his shoulders up and tight into the lower end of an ice chimney, which sloped steeply up to our right for another sixty feet and emerged on the skyline of our rib above the 'step.' At the time the rock technique developed by the Lochmatters and Knubels was still in its unwitnessed infancy. The sight of Benoît's repeated defiance of our accepted standard of impossibility had filled me with a new wonder of suspense. In his success I felt mankind had overleaped itself !

Benoît's rope ran out before he could get clear of the ice chimney, so Louis after a rattle of patois had to follow him up. I moved on, into and up the start of the corner ; and from the half-height ledges where he had straddled gave him in turn a shoulder and head. As I leaned inward, I looked straight down between my knees at the down-race of slabs subtending the corner, which sucked my eyes into space with the unpleasant effect that the abrupt starting of a lift produces below the midriff. Louis took off from my head with a spring that all but dislodged me. In a few seconds he was up, and kicking athletically as he jammed the upper third of his body into the base of the ice chimney.

At this instant Benoît shouted frantically ; and—probably loosened by the rope—a plate of rock spun into sight against the clouds, and bounced flatly and by good fortune glancingly, upon the broad of Louis' back. He was not even bruised, but

every bottle in his sack was smashed! Now I had protested against the number of wine bottles it had been thought necessary to carry for this expedition. When therefore the blended liquor, purple and yellow, streaked and spotted, oozed down the face of the rock above my head I could not refrain from a gurgle of satisfaction at the temperance moral. But the rock was indiscriminating in its preachment. Skimming off Louis, it spun on and down, edgewise, across my right arm, laying open the back of my hand and numbing my shoulder.

It was no place for first aid: and when Louis called on me clamorously to follow, I did my clumsy best without discussion: but also without a supporting head to hoist me up to the overhang, and—without a right arm. Somehow I scrabbled up under the drum. But swing across it and up into the ice chimney I could not: I dared not trust my numbed arm for that one-handed grip and up-swing! I shouted my difficulty to Louis, who was invisible in the chimney above. For all answer he opined that it must be done, adding the warning that although he could hold me, he was in no position to lift me on the rope.

It has twice been my fate in the Alps to come off upon the rope. Both times, I am glad to think, after giving warning that I should; and both times, I am sorry to relate, after receiving the answer that I must not, as no help could be given me. I tried the swing. My arm gave like a damp cracker: and off I dangled over suggestive space. I realized at once that, since Louis could do no more than hold me suspended, I must somehow climb up the rope. This, I may say, is a feat hardly possible to perform, even in youth, when one is oscillating at the end of a thin Alpine rope tied round one's chest. I tried to pull up several times with my left hand, and dropped back again. Then I forced my right hand to assist, and so gained a few inches, which I maintained by the help of my teeth. My kicking boot-nails caught against some roughness on the rock face, and this eased matters for the arms. I shifted my hands a few more inches up the rope, spied a left handhold high up on the rock drum, squirmed for it, and in a trice had my shoulders fixed in the bottom of the beneficent ice chimney.

Benoît climbed on, and out at the top. Louis and I, heel to hat, wriggled ungracefully up the ice-backed cleft in pursuit. Soon we were all out on the edge of our rib again, victoriously above the formidable 'step.' My hand was quickly bandaged—the scar still remains—and, best of all, the drastic use of the numbed arm had done its work: it bothered me no more that day.

But it was a climb. Brobdingnagian slabs, bedded like dragon-scales one upon the other, with their chipped edges overlapping and overlapping,—but 'all glorious with jolly jewels' of friction holds. As we came up under the shadow of the great north ridge, our subsidiary rib soared upward and outward, a buttress of support for the north Tower projecting above us on the ridge crest. This lift of the buttress looked unassailable. Our only course was to get down off our rib on the right, on to the adjacent plane of slabs: and make our way up them to a nick in the skyline just south of the Tower.

Accordantly with the steady excrescence of the rib, this neighbouring plane of slabs had been sinking further and further below us on the right. In places the ill-supported right wall of the rib was even tending to sag over the slabs, in dizzy rock-cornices and pendent eaves. But behind a turret or sentry-box which guarded the foot of the buttress, we discovered a vertical convenience of a descending chimney. And this discharged us pleasantly, together with some of its loose content, on to the lower slabs.

The smooth plane was steeply inclined. But, like the half-open fan which it resembled, the bare expanse of rock was here already folding and hollowing slightly, agreeably with the convergence of the fan-sticks upon the little col above us. We struck up the platten diagonally, making for the rent in the snow-fringe glittering along the ridge. They were exceptionally hold-less slabs, and embossed with ice. This was the one passage on the ascent where it was not possible for at least one of us to find some sort of anchorage. And this, and the ascent of the 'step,' were the only two places where I recognized that a 'fixed' rope might be justifiably placed if this side of the mountain was to be considered as open for all classes of climbers. Just once, as we tip-toed in order up our microscopic footholds, Louis in a low voice of emotion exhorted me to caution. But indeed it was the sort of finicking foot-work that could only please any frequenter of the Lliwedd crags. All too soon we were swarming through the miniature cornice, and rubbing warmth into our fingers in a frosting of sunlight on the north ridge. Three hours through the glacier at the start, and only four and a quarter on the rib—our rib had served us well.

We stood upon a high, slender crest, half solid, half froth of snow, in that half-way world that is neither quite the sky nor yet quite the familiar earth. Far down upon either hand the lowlands of white glaciers broadened unevenly, slipping over

at their occasional edges into green-shadowed furrows ; wherein, yet deeper, we knew must lie the Zermatt and Zinal valleys full of unseen life and habitation. But the sunlit snow-spaces and their highland of jutting peaks, widening all ways to the circle of the horizon, looked to the eye the true surface of dignified earth. The remembered network of human activity, crowded and burrowing far down in those insignificant creases of shadow, seemed to belong to the less real world of the two, at best an undeveloped form of life in the grub state. This impression a wide view of mountain height can often give us. It contributes not a little to that consciousness of belonging to a higher and winged order of creation which makes mountaineers so readily intelligible to one another, even in their weaknesses, so unintelligible, even in their virtues, to other varieties of mankind.

From our feet, with the flickering precision of a rapier thrusting in riposte, the snow-blade of the north ridge flashed upward to the perfect apex of the Weisshorn pyramid. With that challenge in view it was difficult to sit demurely upon a fern-frosted knob, and endure for the guides' leisurely breakfast. I condoled, suitably I hope, with Louis as he emptied the splintered mush and mash out of his rucksack. But I smiled, gracelessly I fear, to myself at the thought that there wasn't a pennyworth of drink left in that monstrous deal of sack.

Then in a sustained rush, as lightly as if the snow-blade were itself travelling upward with our feet upon it, we sped up the ridge ; and in less than an hour stood triumphing upon the cone. Though not the highest, in supremacy of form and of position the summit of the Weisshorn is the snow queen of the Alps, and looks out royally upon the concourse of the lesser princes. The Matterhorn alone, like some black-armoured leader of Free Companions, stands a little aloof, dissociating its severe and dissimilar supremacy from a homage which it may itself as justly claim.

On the snowy edge of the east ridge, far below us, we could see the black dots of parties ascending or already descending upon that side. I should have been content to complete the traverse by following them mildly down to Zermatt. But the Theytaz had other plans : I only learned later that an engagement awaited them the next day at Zinal, which would be forfeited by a descent upon the Zermatt side. The glory of a descent by the whole length of the great North Ridge, which had been at that time only twice ascended and never descended, was suggested with such tact that I gave way. Young as I was, I

suspected nevertheless that we had all had about enough of effort and excitement, in view of our preparation of sleepless nights.

On the quick feet of success we sped back down our snow crest to the north Tower. This time we climbed it to its summit, just for the pleasure of climbing it, and of looking down again for a moment upon the unpromising steepness of our snake-rib of the morning. Then we launched out upon the perspective of the long, castellated north ridge. Leaning tower beyond leaning tower, black-avised and snow-capped, crest and spike and cornice rimmed with ice and snow, I am afraid that their never-ending interest appealed always more faintly to muscles fatigued and to an ambition already satisfied. Time was against us, the light failing. I seem to see the snow-cruised towers leaning crazily from the high ridge against a darkening violet of evening. The morrow's engagement hurried us into a pace irrational for such climbing. I got cross, as we do when we are young and tired. I had the sense to keep this to myself. But time and again when I was urged to make a hey-presto traverse down snow-slippery ledges across the face of a sheer tower, I moved with a creaky deliberation intended to express injured dignity. A memory of chilled muscles, and irritation, and of the merging of snow ridge and snow sky in a murky obscurity—until they looked like a single ragged sheet of much-used blotting-paper, smudged with darker inkblots of snow-free rock—that is the revenge which the magnificent north ridge has taken for our descent of it as an afterthought. And yet, as I look back, I would willingly live every moment of that fatigue again; which is, I suppose, the only reliable test we can apply to past experience.

Through whole æons of dark effort, and of Nilotic mud of thought, we crept on. Until the nightmare procession of interrupting towers ended at last upon the ice shoulder of the Weiss-hornjoch. Heavily Louis set to work to cut steps down its steep western fall. There was a protest in every weary whang of his axe. We were all jaded to the very quick of our nerves, and mutually aware of it. Benoît, who was following me down the ice-ladder, very excusably interpreted my guarded silence as exhaustion, and persisted in coddling me down the steps on a short rope. No one—under twenty-five—mindful that for hours we had been trusting one another on passages where the slip of one might have meant disaster to all, could have borne in silence that last straw upon the hump of his ill-humour. I did not. The little storm of unreason sputtered electrically up and down the rope, and died harmlessly in our collective gloom.

Down the soft snow of the Turtmann glacier we tramped doggedly. The silhouette of Louis ahead of me, black against the red disk of sunset, as he swayed wearily from foot to foot with drooping head and drooping shoulders, has stayed ever since in my mind as the type of the tired man.

We trailed over the col de Tracuit; and then, inexplicably, as we came off the snows on to the kindlier valley slopes, our humour altered:

Indeed we were waxen weary; but who heedeth weariness
Who hath been all day on the mountain——?

The sun was setting against our eyes in wrathful colours. The cloud effect of anger was not the sun's real mood, I knew. Was then our irritation any more real, which the sunset was caricaturing with such teasing solemnity? I had to laugh. Louis looked round, and chuckled. We were all talking cheerfully before the sun went down.

After all, we were in Zinal before night; and in seven and a half hours from the summit. But if youth has the more spring at the time, it takes longer than our maturity to recover from an over-tax upon energy. In later years a day's rest would have sufficed; but it was a week before I could replace the output of that day. Unluckily, for fellow-passengers as much as for myself, that week included the terrors of the journey home, with the then traditional and scandalous scrimmage for seats at Lausanne, in which, to the fairy godmother's delight, an ice-axe often played the principal villain's part.

Often as we were on the Weisshorn in other years, we never revisited our delightful rib: perhaps for a sufficient reason. To popularize the ascent the Zinal guides draped it with some three thousand feet of fixed cable. And if ever on the summit I suggested it to Knubel as a way of descent, he used tactfully to avoid referring to it by the name—complimentary to myself—given to it upon the Zinal side, and under his usual childlike gravity would adumbrate a doubt whether so fine an afternoon ought rightly to be devoted to a descent known, upon his side of the Weisshorn, as—"Par les Cordes."

CHAPTER V

FINDING THE FELLOW-TRAVELLER

Take them, O heart,
the joy of comrades and the thrill of strife.
Who has the hills for friend
has a good-speed to end
his path of lonely life,
and wings of golden memory to depart :
take them for love, true heart.

HAPPY are the children born in the mountain purple,
in the shadow of hills, or in sight of their heather,
or whose

Mountain sires, on mountain standing,
Up in the air, crowned with the golden sun,
See their heroic seed and smile to see them—

For them the approaches are easy, and family friend and guide and porter attend their entry upon an inheritance by right.

The less fortunate must make their own rougher way ; and in nothing are they more handicapped than in their search for the right companion. Contemporaries, equally unpractised, cannot correct wrong methods and short views, which readily become a habit. The tricks of the climbing trade are many, and in themselves amusing. The first steps in mountain knowledge look very like its real adventures. For lack of a pilot with the longer view, some of us may waste all our enterprise upon the tricks alone ; and discover too late, or not at all, that climbing craft is only a means to an end, and that the steps of mountaineering discovery were arranged as a stairway, which might have led us to a region of impression and of adventure inexhaustible in the course of a single lifetime.

In the Alps, for a few weeks each summer, the current of living and thinking seemed to me to flow more naturally and twice as strongly. But their novel conditions imposed a check. They talked a language, as I have said, strangely familiar, but of which the meaning of each word had to be re-learned. I could

not recover among them at once the sense of confident intercourse quickly established among our own hills. Certain of the guides had helped me, principally in points of technique, to master the introductory steps. Friends had shared and doubled the fun of a mountain novitiate ; but their views were no longer than mine as to whither it was leading us. The guides, in fact, had been too seldom companions : the friends not often qualified enough to help as guides.

Almost by accident I became interested in the people of the country. So far, I think, only the guides by profession had seemed worth noticing. All other Swiss, such as could live among the Alps and yet not set the climbing of them before everything else, simply did not count. A friend of student days in Germany, a Swiss of the Viking type, brought me, by way of a pilgrimage through the Bavarian highlands, to pass the winter months with his kinsfolk in Appenzellerland. From cottage to farm we wandered over the snow, made welcome everywhere by the warm-hearted, sophisticated peasantry. Professors, musicians, lace-makers, and stalwart children, during the summer months a half of each family was dispersed in various avocations over three-quarters of Europe ; and they returned every winter to the hardy life of the cottage group, " to breathe for a time freely "—as they said.

Through the evenings we sat by log fires, the women lace-making and talking, the men carving or idling, and—often—all singing. On festival eves we tramped or sleighed, or crowded into little trains wriggling up the snow hills, to watch pagan bonfires roaring red over the frozen hillsides, and—always—all singing. The women, their rounded contralto notes dropping through the cold air " wie goldene Kugeln," tossed the song back and forward between the sleighs or down the sauntering train. While the men accompanied them on a surf-beat of jodelling undertone.

Or, again, a few of us would walk all night across the white foot-hills, talking indiscriminately in three languages, or trudging wordless and content, while the frosty stars cut like swords between the black fir-branches above the snow, and again and again black-beards and gold-beards would shout unexpectedly into a chorus. In the clear night air the harmonized voices had a cleanness and resonance that made one hug oneself with excitement, and stamp heels into the snow in a dance of joy at being alive.

And yet I wondered at them. They were Swiss : mountains

should have filled their thoughts and talk. But they were as much concerned as the dull plain-dwellers with the commonplace topics of money, professions and marriages : they did not know their greater peaks even as well as I did ! I recall this not in criticism, but to throw a side-light upon my own point of view in those years.

After this sojourn, when I returned to the folk of my higher, summer Alps, men less civilized, harsher, like their Oberland intonation, I knew better how to find friends among them too. Below a rougher crust they were of the same stuff as their eastern, more cultivated countrymen ; as broad in sympathy, if narrower in outlook, as refined in essential feeling, if less articulate and tuneful in its expression.

The Swiss valleys, like the Swiss people, are only discoverable in other than the summer months of tourist traffic. The Zermatt valley, as we may see it in August, has little charm of its own. I was puzzled, when at last I ventured to visit this innermost sanctuary sacred to the memory of the first mountaineering prophets, to account for their enthusiastic love of its dusty gorges, warm-smelly paths and sparse exhausted colours. Until, one winter, I rediscovered it. Since then I have been up or down it in every month but one of the year ; and I hardly know its equal for variable loveliness. In autumn, brilliant with coloured foliage, with dew or frost sparkling in gems of light from twig and thorn. In the green outbreak of spring, when the rush of the mounting sap is almost as audible as the stream-bubble from the melting snow. Under winter snows, when the upright crags and sliding spits of scree and forest are fighting forlornly to shoulder off an accumulating weight of silence. Whatever month and whatever way we choose, by sleigh or by the ice-smothered railway-track, always above us in the lengthening or the shortening hours of sunlight we have glimpses of fantastic glaciers falling out of cloud-land and of white peaks balanced unaccountably in improbable space. And always, at the end of the valley, reserving its dramatic entry for the last second and cliff corner, comes the sudden, full-length revelation of the incomparable Matterhorn.

In that first winter of rediscovery it was the soundlessness of the snow-valley that surprised me most. The echo of the torrent deep below us in the gorge was too continuous to be heard for long as a sound, and the occasional crash of great icicles down the cliffs only intensified the stillness. I was walking with Marcus Beresford Heywood and old Clemenz ; and in expect-

ation of a sleigh promised us by Hermann Seiler we spent the night at Skt. Niklaus, then no more than a name to me. But if the day had re-created the real valley, the concourse that evening in the little restaurant admitted us to the real guide-life of the high Alps. Lochmatters, Knubels, Pollingers, Imbodens, Brantschens, Taugwalders—for Skt. Niklaus is the village home of the aristocracy of the guiding families of the last two generations—with a sprinkling of Bieners, Schallers, Aufdenblattens and Burgeners from near by, they welcomed us like Christmas cousins into their historic company.

Not unlike the eastern Swiss, but in a different form of occupation, the men of these preponderatingly masculine hamlets are scattered over the Continent for most of the year. Each winter, with an irresistible homing instinct, they return to overcrowd the chalets for a season of excessive hardship. In the pocket of a deep gorge where the sun enters for but a few hours each day, the winter struggle for existence is so severe, and so early must even the babies begin to take their working part in it, that the average length of life has been estimated to me at but little more than thirty years. Yet no easier way of life has any attraction for them. Much-travelled, worldly, and on the surface even a little cynical, no contact with the outside world appears to disturb the bedrock simplicity of their instincts.

One of the most accomplished and conversable of guides after reviewing most of the sights of Paris and London with polite composure, was only stirred to speak with genuine warmth of the size of the black Berkshire pigs and the advantages of importing them. One summer, again, I spent some nights in a hut far up on the glaciers. The guardian, who stayed there for all the summer months, had with him his little son. Underfed, scrap-clad, sleeping on boards, often snow-bound, the lonely child's only occupation seemed to be chopping ice from the glacier outside the door to melt into water, or making day-long solitary crossings of the icefalls to fetch sticks for the stove. "No one but a half-savage could stand such a life," I thought, "—an aboriginal with an undeveloped brain, incapable even of imagining any other way of living!" And then his father, a task-master who spoke only to grumble his orders, mentioned casually that his boy had a standing engagement every winter as a hall-page in a gilt-and-glitter hotel at Monte Carlo. As I looked again at the tongue-tied little Orson I found that it was my own imagination that was proving inadequate!

I gave up trying to fathom the valley mind: and remained content to make friends with its kindly manners.

The travelled guides of Skt. Niklaus we found to be admirable conversationalists. Innuendo, anecdote, caustic comment, hour after hour for half the night they kept us entertained. Frail elderly Josef Imboden, the soft-voiced Nestor of the 'Gemeinde,' led the talk. His contemporary, burly Alois Pollinger, his fiery blue eyes glinting behind a mat of auburn beard, spoke but seldom and always then with humorous point. Characteristic was his grave comment, when his famous sons recited for us a semi-heroic epic, of a stout German, who had spent fifteen nights out on the Matterhorn without reaching as high as the 'old hut.' Alois cleared his throat, and his sons became respectfully silent: "I think it would be better to start with that gentleman from the *top* next year!" Josef Pollinger, prince of the guides of his generation, suave in talk, Rupert-like in action, with the family eyes of a blander, more beguiling blue. Rudolf Lochmatter, elder of that long brotherhood, whom the guides of all the Alps still acclaimed as equal to the best: an appearance of almost fragile distinction, in his bearing the refinement of a tragedy—the loss of a hand in early manhood—which had excluded him, officially, from guiding upon his beloved mountains. His brother, Josef, a big graceful athlete with laughing white teeth and a courtesy genially royal. Franz, the third, then still all but unknown, in whom the comeliness of the Italian strain had been something sacrificed, in order to produce probably the most perfect mountaineer, physically and temperamentally, whom the Alps have known. Historic little Peter Knubel, in great but slightly unvenerable age; with his handsome elder son—whose name was to be the next added to that tragic family roll of honour. These were but a few in the laughing, big-shouldered crowd. And among them old Clemenz Ruppen crinkled and gutturalled modestly, immensely pleased at the cordiality which welcomed him in such company as an equal.

As we returned to our inn the second night, up the muddy drain of a village street, our heads awl with the first-hand stories of feats legendary already in literature, a gauche timid-looking lad with a slight stoop, who had been chopping wood unnoticed under the gallery of our small chalet, slouched out, and shoved a notebook shyly into my hand. I promised to look at it. The name in it was Josef Knubel, which meant nothing to me then—there were so many of one name in Skt. Niklaus.



JOSEF KNUBEL

He was too young to qualify as a guide, but it was already a fine record of expeditions. I talked with him the next day. He was reserved and aloof as a forest Indian, with a primitive head, thin bleached hair and the eyes of a dreamer. Only an inarticulate ambition to be always hunting chamois or imitating their methods on the heights seemed to distinguish a figure which compared ill with the princely fraternity of adventurers.

A year or so later, when I wanted a second guide for a large party, I remembered the log-chopping lad out in the cold. He joined us on the Aiguille d'Argentière, one of a dozen experiments I was making to train-on a young and unspoiled guide. By chance our first guide failed us badly, in a thunderstorm, and had to be dismissed. Josef slipped into his shoes, and, more skilful than that other Cinderella, he kept them on. His own master, and on a free mountain side, he became at once a different being, keen, concentrated and laughter-loving. No good fairy was needed to discover to us his remarkable qualities as a climber.

Later in that season we drove back in a two-horse-chay across the passes into Switzerland, the first of many leisurely night drives before the railway made the crossing conventional. With the stars and our pipes alight, and our feet up on the driver's box in front, we lay back in a long intermittent gossip that began our friendship. Not that speech had ever much to say to our intimacy. We had little in common but our feeling for the hills. We liked mountains in the same way; we liked the same active ways of showing our affection for them, in sunshine or in shadow. We were most at our equal ease in joint action on the heights, and then generally in a comfortable taciturnity. Mutual confidence grew of itself, during moments of common danger, hours and even days of exhausting effort, weeks of unspoken contentment or disappointment. Until, when the shadows fell, as they may about the path of any mountaineer, and we had once and again to share those labours of search that can only end in the presence of death, I knew instinctively that there was no one upon whom I could so well rely, for the highest form of courage as well as for the faultless sympathy which shirks no responsibility so long as action is required, but which never trespasses beyond, into its useless expression.

But that was still all in the future. In the summer following the Skt. Niklaus visit, it was Josef Lochmatter who joined Hubert Young and myself in the eastern Oberland, for a sun-smoked strenuous week. From the Eggishorn we made a first ascent of the Strahlgrat to the Klein Wannehorn, and named for our

pleasure a couple of its minor points. Some ochre-coloured pinnacles on the final ridge suggested for one peak the name of 'Senfspitze.' The further summit, 'die Klaue'—because it looked like a gaping lobster-claw—gave us some livelier moments on its clean slabs.

On the scorching descent to the Aletsch glacier we were choked and grimed to the bones with heat, grit and drouth. No wonder that, from a-deep and afar, the blue-irised eye of the Märjelensee, blinking up from its corona of white ice, drew us like a magnet. For its startling relief the bathe in its icy waters, to which we raced rather than yielded, remains a sun-patch in memory. From head to toes, as we dived, the cold blue water lashed us like a stinging thong. Round heat-clogged limbs and through parched nostrils and throat the ice-bubbles effervesced like some wine of the gods, dissolving our gross clay into a lightness of foam. Breath only returned as we surged out on to a rock, and lay gasping in the sun. As the stabbing, exhilarating cold subsided, and sensation returned, it felt as if the aerated froth into which our bodies had been whipped was again gradually solidifying into new-made flesh and bone.

I basked through a glorious reincarnation on the rock, and watched Hubert's slim sun-burn race a second time along the crest of the glass-blue icecliffs opposite, to dart outward on a long descending curve over the lake. His reflection flashed as smoothly up to meet him, through the sapphire depths between the floating icebergs. Only twice have I bathed in water as cold; once, under rain, in a snow-melt on the Arpitetta alp, and once in an icepool on the Findelen glacier—but that was in the tail of a snowstorm, and a squall of wind delayed unconscionably the moment of warm reincarnation, the indescribable sensation of a new heart returning to glowing life in a body remade.

We tramped round, and over the Grimsel, and up to the Pavillon Dollfus. As an interior a little over-named, it is set coquettishly at an irritating height above the Unteraar glacier. On this occasion the divided cabin was serving as the summer residence of a germanic professor and his family. Since one half of it was sacred to his wife's toilet, and the other to his bored and resentful children, none of whom ever went out for fear of forfeiting their claim, we roosted on the stony platform outside, only making spasmodic dashes for the stove and a combined charge for a strip of the bunk at night.

During the subsequent racing days with Josef Lochmatter, the belief began to take more certain shape within me, that to



MÄRJEENSEE

climb well rhythm was essential: the body had to acquire a power of continuous movement over every interruption of surface, effortless in seeming and aiming at grace. It was a simple truth, common knowledge in other athletic games. But it had never been mentioned in any climbing manual, and it was not to be learned by watching the struggling muscular methods practised by British, or other, rock-climbing in its infancy. Even when appreciated, it took years to master, and some audacity to formulate as a theory. But the last and best laugh over the word 'rhythm' is now his who can watch the modern style of even very difficult rock-climbing, and note how far transmitted experience has already corrected the staccato practice of an earlier generation.

The Lochmatter demonstration was enough, also, to impress upon me at once how well a safe overcoming of difficulties could be combined with pace: the pace not of a bravura finale, but of a smooth legato movement, guided in its continuity by a sure anticipation of what each next movement is to be. Josef Lochmatter was a big man and a heavy. But up or down he travelled as weightlessly as thistledown. Once, high up on the Weisshorn, news reached him of a small son's sickness. He asked leave to go ahead on the descent. We were not a slow party, but Josef floated away from us as if we had been standing still. We had not rounded the last tower on the ridge when I saw him already appear on the glacier thousands of feet below, moving with the 'unhurrying speed' of avalanche snow.

We divided forces; and Josef Lochmatter and I made a first ascent of the north ridge of the Vorder Zinkenstock, which stands between the Ober- and Unter-aar glaciers. One step in the ridge gave us pause. About the sheer base of a tower a half-sloughed skin of rock was loosely pinned. It groaned and settled whenever we looked at it. In the end we scaled it up the eastern flank, by a sixty-foot chimney overhanging a tilted slab. I belayed Josef for the chimney riding myself side-saddle on the slab, for only support one knee hooked over the pommel of my ice-axe poked into a crack. We completed the whole arc of the Zinkenstock ridge at a run; and came down over the Desorstock in a blinding polter of snow mist. It was a hurricane day; one which Josef used to recall in after years with a smile and a meaning stretch of his long limbs.

Once again we freed ourselves from domestic embroilments with the professor's family, and all four of us made the first ascent of the Escherhorn. We were able, incidentally, to correct

an error of the map in the location of the highest point of that prominent little peak. From the Thierberg glacier up to the end of its eastern ridge we mounted by an open couloir ; and we had scarcely emerged at the upper end, when all its furniture, hundreds of tons of cap-stones, props and partiwalls, thundered in an uproar of black dust on to the glacier below. It is an insidious risk, peculiar to a certain type and situation of rock couloir, and almost unforeseeable. Some years later we made a new crossing of the Aiguille called l'Évêque above the Mer de Glace ; and had just descended, with velvet caution, a similar couloir on to the glacier de Talèfre, when—and not two minutes after we had left it—the whole rock lining of the couloir crumpled out, and shattered after us on to the glacier in an ear-splitting discharge.

The east ridge of the Escherhorn, however, when we reached it, proved honourably firm ; difficult enough, also, to account for the fact that so prominent a peak should have remained so long unclimbed. “Here we have almost Chamonix !” was Lochmatter’s pleased comment, when the edge of the ridge beat us and forced us off on to its southern flank. Soon we found ourselves reduced to assuming a line of ascent up this southern wall, by way of a groove which looked only a little less over-hanging than its neighbours. And how Clemenz enjoyed himself ! My last climbing memory of him is as he chuckled and clung with finger and toes to cracks on a wide sheer cliff, while Lochmatter stood upon his shoulders and took breath for an arm-swing and pull-up over the overhang above.

Polished corner, and crack, and knob, the climb played for our benefit a tonic ascending scale ; and it ended on a triumphant chord of all three combined. We came down by the south ridge as far as we could. Then it, too, spurned us off its crest ; and we had to creep down its western flank, towards the little hanging glacier. Somewhere here, down a gutter-shoot, I learned for the first time how much more awkward it is in practice than in theory to descend neatly on a ‘doubled rope.’ Rumpled and skin-scraped after my inexpert wriggles, with coat and shirt twisted up round my ears and putties dragged both tight and loose, I looked up from a ledge below the shoot, and sighed with admiration to see Lochmatter as last man flash down upon us out of the same entanglement in a single ripple of graceful descent.

It was the last big climb upon which old Clemenz could be induced to accompany our lighter years. I am glad to think

that my association with the gallant old mountaineer, to whom I owed so much, ended appropriately upon a victorious first ascent among his own Oberland mountains.

But that season of transition, and of experiment in companions, held something still in store. A few days later, with Robin Mayor for inspiration, and a patient Lötschenthaler as beast of burden, we made a first and guideless ascent of the Thierregghorn, a bold-looking rock summit under the south face of the Bietschhorn.

We examined it hopefully, as we wound across the savage head-glaciers of the Bietschthal, and fixed on the most northerly of its western ridges. A straightforward climb brought us up to a sharp pinnacle just north of the Thierregghorn; and from here the iron granite of the main crest gave us magnificent scrambling up to our summit. So keen and high-hearted was this rock comb that, as we swarmed up its edge and looked down on either side, the wall fifty feet below our boots looked, even at that lower level, to be still only a few feet through.

The rock tip was saturated with sun. So we coiled ourselves down to sleep in warm, gritty pockets. My own eyrie faced the enormous southern crags of the Bietschhorn, upon which I had designs. But their dissolute red pinnacles would do nothing but shift and revolve before a drowsy eye, as restless a prospect as the bridal cake-work upon Milan cathedral. So I turned a little to the west, and the more distant Doldenhorn, an unsubstantial cone of snow filming into transparency against a hot blue sky, melted with me soothingly dreamward—for uncounted time.

On our descent, the south arête showed itself to be, if anything, sharper and more gratifying than the north. Over part of its comb we had to walk upon our hands, with our feet divorced and dangling in agitation over the Bietschthal and the Balt-schiederthal respectively. We left it, by some easy chimneys and traverses down the west face, and landed once again at the head of the Bietschthal. The little Augstkumme glacier snatched at our feet, and launched us into a series of snow-glissades, down, and always more darkly down, to a stumbling end among the interminable screes of In Rämi.

Here, in the valley, we parted. Mayor, with the prospect of the Bietschhorn before him on the next day, returned over the Bietschjoch into the Lötschenthal; while I, with the rumble of the stuffy Paris train already booming in imagination through the close air below me, made the fastest dash of an alpine life

into the baking-oven of the Rhone valley. In a continuous sweltering canter, down the glacier, through the stifling wooded gorge, and zig and zag in pursuit of the infinite misleading of cliff-track and water-conduit, I reached Raron in one and three quarter hours of depression. And not all the aerated lemonade in the sun-dried chalets, nor all the ice-grey bathing-waters of the rough, rude Rhone, could make comfortable that return to the dull levels of life—or restore a normal circulation.

CHAPTER VI

RIDGES AND FAILURES

He opens an enchanted gate
for each untrodden ridge ;
he cleaves the blue precipitate stair
up the white domes of frost and air,
and moulds the foam-snow bridge.
How small the earth to those wide eyes,
and the near welcome of the skies
how infinitely great.

IT is attractive, when we look back upon our efforts, to group them into companies ; and to claim for each group the dignity of a consistent purpose. For instance, I should like to say that all the new ascents up the south faces of Pennine and other peaks were undertaken with the single purpose of freeing these good south walls of their undeserved reputation for danger by stone-fall. But, as a matter of honesty, I believe them to have been disconnected attempts, and made only as whim or weather dictated.

Perhaps, however, the undertakings, largely unsuccessful, to 'ridge' a number of summits in the course of one expedition can be claimed as homogeneous. Mountains which we climbed directly upward and separately, by known ways, seemed often to have been given too little law. They had not had space to re-create their old-time atmosphere of mystery, or time to develop into spacious adventures. But whenever we could contrive to arrive upon their linking summits along a skyline of ridge, then, for both the summit and ourselves, the connection with lower earth seemed to have been effectively broken. Isolation and the more continuous views, height and our own more protracted effort, all combined to surround us with the remoteness proper to genuine adventure. Upon a ridge, each summit as we saw it behind or before us in the sky stood for a culminating point on a higher plane of feeling, an ouch at either end of a lofty chain of romance.

For it so happened that as great mountains grew familiar,

their centre of attraction shifted. The glamour was not lost. It was always there in prospect: sometimes about us on the laziest climb. But with the improvement in our skill it tended to retreat before us. We could be only certain of recapturing it behind increasing difficulties, at the price of greater exertions. In intimacy, if mutual respect is to survive, there must be some reserve upon both sides, guarding areas of personality that remain always a promised land. Secure of our mountain affection, the Alps protected their mystery behind barriers of refusal that left us no respite in our pursuit. It fell to us, on our side, to enlist every circumstance that could keep our sensibility to their impression fresh, and to dignify our active part in the relationship by making our climbing as nearly as possible an expression of our independent selves or of any originality we might possess.

Romance, adventure, and the like, they are hackneyed terms, and we can all smile at them. But the spirit they describe is also laughably persistent among us; and when we are talking of mountains, and not of politics or ethics, we need not happily be continually rebottling the old wine of unrest in the terms of each new generation. It is, after all, a venerable spirit of adventure which drives us out to find, as we may, the discipline which alone can make a useful—or what once was called a manly—business of our short life. Progress, in the sense of change for the better, depends upon the survival among us of this unrestful spirit, and upon each individual finding for it a disciplined way of service.

Mountains may seem a limited or cranky angle in which to educate our years of unease and strength. But mountains and seas are the largest and best equipped natural training-schools for manhood. They embody power, beauty, calculable resistance, and the laws of growth and change by which we live, upon a scale comprehensible by our bodily senses, and yet impressive enough to command spiritual awe. Human beings can only learn by sight, by hearing, or by touch. For the rest, for our instinctive beliefs, for all we cannot prove, we are in like manner very dependent upon material symbols, such as can interpret for us our more metaphysical ideas or imaginings. And these symbols may be words, forms artificial or forms natural. Upon this educative experience, acquired rationally through the senses or emotionally with the help of the explanatory symbols, we base our self-discipline; which is the application of the principles revealed by our experience, actual or

imaginative, to the governance of our individual tempers, desires, and impulses.

In this experience, in interpretation, and in self-discipline, there is no better instructor than a mountain. Its beauty, its difficulty, its lively suggestion of great and hidden forces, and its never-failing surprise above us, delight and provoke anew our restless spirit of enterprise. A mountain answers to our need for something big, solid, and worth while, against which to measure and discipline our own strength. At the same time, its mystery, its presentation of a natural order more enduring than our own, can provide our instinct of reverence or our craving for belief with images or symbols of every degree or quality of the super-natural which we are likely, individually, to be capable of imagining.

If we look upon a mountain in this spirit, it may seem less inappropriate that some of us should have tried to keep the way clear for its full effect upon ourselves by enlisting every help of circumstance. Few, probably—to cite a more familiar instance—would question the propriety of reserving for services of another order a cathedral or temple or some special precinct, where all the atmosphere can be made to contribute to the feelings which we are seeking to maintain or renew.

Even in holiday mountaineering a parting of the ways comes early. We may continue then, if we choose, to treat mountains superficially, as a diversion only for the restless years during which they can succeed in provoking our curiosity or our vanity. In that case, we must find our training-ground for manhood elsewhere. Or we may take the whole course in self-discovery and self-discipline. In which case we must expect that mountains will make the exercises progressively more difficult in proportion as the knowledge to which they lead grows increasingly worth having; and we must make every effort on our own part to increase their opportunity of impressing us in divers way, and to profit by the impressions.

Something of this sort was in my mind when I began to find it less easy every year to fit in the chance companionship of other mountain amateurs or guides with the stage I had myself just reached in progressive mountaineering. To the pleasures of friendship, and of sharing a common enthusiasm, some part of each season must certainly be given. But some part, too, seemed worth devoting to the rigour of the game. Any obligation to consider human ties or weaknesses—other than one's own—interfered with concentration upon the strictly moun-

taineering lessons, even though it might be agreeably. The ideal companion, therefore, to share in this serious and delightful part of the holiday task must be just so much fitter and more skilful than myself as to be able to relieve me of all preoccupation on his account. If, at need, he could contribute something to the solution of our problem, as well as take his full half-share in the work, so much the better.

It sounds purposeful and priggish. But I did not think all this at the time. Circumstances, sociability, and a mountaineering instinct, sometimes in conjunction, sometimes in opposition, worked out for themselves a certain line of action. The explanation suggested itself later: and is necessarily conjectural.

Into the position of companion during the more rigorous mountain days, Josef Knubel drifted imperceptibly. We came to know each other's imperfections first, a good groundwork. We neither of us asked for more than that the other should climb as securely at the end of a testing day as at the beginning, and that he should treat a fluctuating mood as tactfully as a technical shortcoming. The rest we could leave confidently to the surpassing attachment to the hills which we shared, and too consciously for it ever to have needed mention between us.

But even Josef fell a victim occasionally to 'other engagements,' or to some such common guide-ailment as a hand injured by opening a tin with a pocket-knife. Good weather was not to be lost, and I never dared waste a day of the few weeks I could spend each year in the Alps. So it fell upon a day, in a season when 'ridging' peaks seemed to offer at once the next exercise in the mountain course and the last-discovered preservative of their impressiveness, that I engaged in his place a prominent young guide of a promising record. My intention was to traverse the whole of the flowing skyline round the head of the Zermatt valley, beginning with Monte Rosa and ending with the Breithorn and the Thèodule pass.

We started from the Riffelberg about midnight, to avoid the over-crowding in the higher, Bétemps hut. By lamp-light we crossed the preliminary glaciers, and in the clear and very cold half-light raced up the Grenzgipfel of Monte Rosa by the route known as 'the rocks.' The ridge thence to the Nordend was hammock-slung with snow, but it cheered us with rising sunlight and with panoramic views out over Italy. We returned along it from the Nordend, recrossed the Grenz, and circled about the marvellous snow-land of frontier—over the



Monte Rosa

Lyskamm

(Klein Triftje Rib)

Castor

Breithorn

MONTE ROSA CHAIN

Zumstein, the Signalkuppe, the Parrotspitze, and the Ludwigs-höhe in turn—descending on perfect snow to the Lys pass. As we visited cumulus after cumulus, quilted in silence and in silver above this high and lonely bed-spread of snow, and passed onward to its sleeping neighbour, I had the frivolous feeling that we were like Polar milkmen, clanking on our round of the land of the midnight sun before any of its slumbering snow bee-hives had stirred into life.

But on the Lys pass we overtook an early bird—a *lämmergeier*!—the king of the guides and trolls, Alexander Burgener. The old giant, his face chiselled from a block of burnt oak and his great grizzled beard bristling from under a faded orange-wool helmet against the white glare, was jerking the worm behind him on a short rope—a flabby germanic tourist. He slung up the steep snow at the start of the Lyskamm arête beside me, growling grim chaff and caustic reminiscence. And without even looking round, with one huge hand behind his back he twitched continuously and contemptuously at his bear-lead. At each twitch there was a snow-plop in our wake, as the luckless man, too much in awe to protest, was snatched one wallow higher up the ladder of leg-splitting steps. Presently, with a laughing thunder-clap backward over his shoulder, and a wink at me as wide as an earthquake, Alexander waved us ahead; and I soon lost what was to be my last sight of the indomitable old Titan—an orange blotch against a white flounder of snow-broth.

The twin summits of the Lyskamm were free from cornice; but there was a wicked fleering of ice upon their flanks in the sun-blaze. From the far side of the western peak the view opened out, and we looked down upon our next goal, the Felikjoch, confused in a heat-dance of glaciers and lesser snow-peaks.

Almost at once we were upon steep ice, traversing critically, and with a nerve-pricking prospect of hacking steps down snow and ice walls at an angle indeterminable in the dancing light. It was not long before I knew what a jockey must feel like when the favourite begins to falter under him. Nothing was actually said in objection—the ass at least refrained from prophesying!—but the other end of my rope vibrated with irresolution. By methods familiar in such crises, I prevented the protest becoming vocal until we were down upon the easier angles of the Felikjoch. But here the cumbrous snow head of Castor, bulking over us discouragingly, condensed the vapour of funk into a concrete symptom. It took the form of a ‘sprained wrist.’

The consequences of further step-cutting or even rope-holding were declaimed in tones of disaster. By a chilly silence, and by myself leading the way up Castor at a pace that interfered with discussion, the crisis was temporarily postponed. But the muttering behind warned me that the summit would prove our limit.

And so it proved. The sight of the descending white swirl down to the Zwillings pass, and of the darker snow-crested arête of Pollux facing us across it, with again, beyond Pollux, the soaring east ridge of the Breithorn, put the extinguisher upon a farthing-dip of valour. We could not separate; so I had to admit defeat. And yet, it would have been so much easier to press on! We had still all the afternoon before us. Only Pollux remained to cross; and with the great east ridge of the Breithorn I was already on terms of old friendship. Before dusk we could have reached the Breithorn summit; and from that summit the snow-canter down the high-way to the Thèodule could be made safely at any hour.

Well, I saw no reason for cutting short a splendid day of sunlight upon the ridges. If to follow them forward was barred, they would be as satisfying backward. We turned and descended again to the Felikjoch. There I pointed out, temperately, that a full-dress retreat from the pass down on to the Zwillings glacier would obviously mean an amount of step-cutting and route-making not to be thought of by a crippled party; and then, leaving no time for silence not to mean consent, I struck at full speed up the wall of the Lyskamm which we had so lately descended.

The ice-plates and snow-curdles upon the arête up to the twin summit had not grown less laborious under long hours of sun. We had to work hard and to work together in face of the difficulties. Small divergences in outlook sank perforce into abeyance. I had at first intended to continue the moral of our retreat by returning over some at least of the summits of Monte Rosa; which would have meant at that hour a good deal of penitentiary snow-ploughing. But the view from the watch-towers of the Lyskamm, when we regained them, was too big-hearted and generous for lesser thoughts. Without any further underlining of the lesson, I could see that the humour of our alternative return, as a line of least resistance, had already begun to work medicinally. For sociable purposes a sense of humour is a passable substitute for a conscience. So I relented; and chose a descent on to the Grenz glacier, by the

most easterly rib down the north face of the Lyskamm, as a dignified compromise.

The cauldron of the Grenz glacier bubbled and treacled a bluish white in the heat. Crevasses steamed open under our feet. Snow-bridges creaked stealthily into nothingness at the breath of our coming. The long glacier trough was airless and sweltering and treacherous, and no place for a party of only two. We wound and leaped and held our breath, while the perspiration ran down, and our damp hair stood up in anxiety. I remarked that the 'wrist' had been long forgotten; and I noticed, too, with dark satisfaction, many envious upward glances at the far convex solidities of the Breithorn, up which we might at that hour have been safely speeding. The heavier grew the oppression on our white-hot stewpan, and the wider its cracks gaped, the higher and longer we hopped and skimmed, like heated rubber balls. And at last we had bounced over the lower rim of the snow-lined melting-pot, and trickled thankfully down on to firmer ice-surfaces. Zermatt witnessed before dusk our unregretful parting.

After all, it had been a great day. But I have never recalled it with entire satisfaction. Our failures from weather, from difficulty and from legitimate fatigue, do not cause us regret: they are part of the mountain game. It is different when the failure has been due to some lack of personal courage or human faltering. Happiness in mountaineering is sympathetic, not individual. It depends as much upon our all preserving the same right attitude of mind towards the climb as upon our assuming throughout it similar right attitudes of the body. A flaw in temper or heart, in the case of one member of the party, affects the pleasure of all of us. Even in memory we shrink from it, as surely as from a chronic twinge of rheumatism in one of our own members.

Josef Knubel was again unavailable when the moment came for ridging the Matterhorn and the Dent d'Hérens in a continuous two days' expedition. The two great peaks are as two crests upon an isolated wave of height; and to traverse them from end to end must be an enterprise worthy of their joint magnificence. The first day I proposed to cross the Matterhorn from east to west: and of the Matterhorn one could never have too much. From the fateful Italian hut, on the second day, the traverse of the Dent d'Hérens would give an opportunity of making friends with its sensational castellated east

ridge, which had then just been ascended for the first time by Ryan and the Lochmatters.

At first I thought to cross the Matterhorn by myself; and old Peter Knubel volunteered to go round by the Thèodule, and meet me at the Italian hut with sufficient provisions. The old gentleman was then, reputedly, almost eighty; but he was jubilant at the idea of again visiting and yarning about the tremendous southern precipices, upon which in the 'sixties and 'seventies he had been one of the earliest and most trusted leaders. Robin Mayor was to traverse the mountain on the same day by the Z'Mutt and Italian ridges; and he offered to release Gabriel Lochmatter at the hut in the evening, to go with me on the next day's continuation over the Dent d'Hérens. I was wandering about Zermatt, still divided in mind between the romance of crossing the Matterhorn alone and the advisability of taking a good man across with me in readiness to act as second guide for the graver business of the following day, when I caught sight of Rudolf Lochmatter's charming and melancholy face. He brightened all over at the suggestion. It meant for him the return, after years of enforced separation, to the greatest of his beloved mountains. It suited his humour also, no less than mine, that we should treat the first day as a holiday, and go as we pleased, by ourselves. For the work of the second day, which would be shared with his brother, I knew that Rudolf with one hand was still the equal of all but a few climbers with two, and that in judgment, enterprise and that rare quality, guiding temperament, he had no superior.

We started from the Schwarzsee hotel, and late, so as to avoid the crowding at the higher hut. We climbed together or apart, as the inclination to talk came and went. Rudolf carried a coil of rope, "so as to look"—he murmured—"like the guide." It was a fine day, and the mountain was thronged. As we overtook the climbing parties one by one on the upper ridges, it became a procession of pleasure to hear the acclamations of welcoming surprise with which the guides hailed his return to the 'great mountains.' As they courteously let us pass, hardly one of them but touched me on the arm and gutturalled his satisfaction, ending with the refrain—in a confidential whisper—"and you can take it from *me* that he would have been the greatest of us!"

Above the Snow-shoulder we were free of company; and went our own ways to the summit, content. I think that on that day the marvellous summit, islanded in space, excelled



Z'Mutt Ridge

Tête
du Lion

MATTERHORN
from the West

even itself. It floated rather than stood above the white sea of reflecting sunlight, unapproachably lonely, beautiful to the point of pain. Perhaps I was seeing it through Rudolf's eyes as well as my own. I could only guess, then, at his thoughts. Now that I know what they must have been, I can understand how much imagination may have helped during those hours to cut the impressions of delight as deep as scars of grief upon memory.

Rudolf roamed away down the north face. To escape interruption when the following parties arrived, I went on to the western peak, and scrambled a short distance down the crags of its southern wall. There, out of sight and sound, stretched in a sun-warmed niche of rock that leaned upon bright air, I dreamed away three of the best hours of a lifetime. A thin glitter of mist drew from time to time up the brown shafts of precipice below me, and vanished in a puff overhead. As my eyes followed it upward with the draught, its passing lent a feeling of soothing motion to my rock cradle, as though the summit, and not the mist alone, were stirring sleepily across space. Beyond my feet the solid world only began again, distantly and uncertainly, in a sunshot haze over the green Lombard plains. Here and there a nearer white peak thrust itself up on tiptoe, ambitious of recognition above its rugged fellows. But its modest trespass only emphasized the solitude and height of the Matterhorn, supreme even in its companion circle of sky and cloud. For almost the only time that I can recall the impulse to give form to an impression kept pace with the current of feeling, and did not wait until the experience of those hours had become 'remembered emotion.' The lines I have called 'Monte Silvio' took shape so effortlessly as not even to disturb the intake of enjoyment. That may serve as their apology.

I was very much awake to all the sights and the silence of the higher sun-world into which the Matterhorn had admitted me. But the sound of a voice on the crest above me startled me as if out of sleep. It shocked me with the surprise with which we hear a real human voice breaking alarmingly through the speech to which we have been listening in our dreams. Mayor had arrived. In a hopeful and practical company we clattered down over the precipices to the Italian hut.

The Italian side of the mountain that day was alive with odd folk and odd happenings. Rudolf and I, moving in suitable detachment, changed our society on the way as we pleased. With Mayor's party, we reached the dizzy crow's-nest of the hut

far enough ahead of the crowd to make sure of sleeping-places, in despite of an Italian phalanx who, having finished their climb, insisted upon spending a second night in the hut rather than descend as they ought to Breuil. A succession of parties followed us out of the sky. And as they appeared, clambering down the enormous red towers on to our roof, the rumours of the day drifted in. One escape was singular enough to be worth recalling. Upon the overhang of the higher peak there is a swinging ladder of wire and rungs. Two guideless men, with insufficient rope between them, started down this. The lower fell off the ladder. The second was pulled after him ; but, by a miracle, caught his thighs between two of the lower rungs. He hung there head downwards, so well jammed that he checked the slide of his companion sprawling down the great slabs below. The weight and drag prevented either man from righting himself. Fortunately there were other parties behind. But even so, it proved difficult to disentangle the human coil in suspension.

Party after party swarmed down upon us ; and the weather grew steadily worse. The earlier arrivals, from caution, and the later from weariness, decided not to proceed further. The tiny hut, which at a squeeze might hold fifteen, was gradually stretched to cover twenty-eight. I busied myself in trying to establish better relations between the jaded guides and a foodless couple of young adventurers who had just done the Z'Mutt arête. It was an officiousness which brought me one of the most lasting of mountain friendships—with the admirable writer, Charles Gos. And then, yet another report reached us : that a lady and her two guides were stranded somewhere on the cliffs above, in the gathering darkness and snow. Two of our young guides gallantly went up again to the rescue ; and brought them down, exhausted, out of the blackness of a blizzard night—and a blizzard night on the Matterhorn ! So, of course, even our guarded inches of bunk had to be surrendered ; and we sat out the miserable hours in a card-pack, shoulder to shoulder with the later-come guides, along the knife-board round the walls.

The air inside grew suffocating. If we opened the door, thick drifts of snow drove in over us on a freezing blast. It was too late to cut, and it was also impossible to shuffle our pack. To move a foot was to kick a prostrate and grunting figure ; to stir an arm was to jog a collapsible neighbour more damply on to one's aching shoulder. Once again in the roar of the snow gusts the Italian hut creaked and shuddered on its chain moorings, lifting for a flap off its crazy pinnacle, and a tail-

spin on to the glaciers. I fought despairingly for the sleep I owed to the morrow. Sometimes an arm went to sleep, sometimes a leg. But never enough of me at one time to count as rest, or to seem other than painful. Why should localized sleep never act even as a local anæsthetic?

Long before an unhomely grey light was diffused through the snow-plastered chinks I knew that, whatever might be the state of the mountains, I for one was in no state to start climbing them. About seven the snow-fall slackened, and a few of us crawled out stiffly on to the snow-covered ledges over Italy. The uneven earth was all a sheet of crumpled snow, and the storm-threshed air above it was yellow with a sickly glare that made spectres of our haggard faces. The Dent d'Hérens was not even discussed. Rudolf looked long across at the ghostly towers of its eastern arête, shrouded under a white shift of snow no more substantial than the vapouring mist about them: and smiled, ruefully. We had as much as we could do to get the demoralized card-pack safely down the slabs and on to the lower slopes. Some men in fatigue grow limp like a certain consistency of margarine. They are too softened to keep shape or cohere internally, and at the same time they lose the butter-quality of sticking to anything—least of all to a knife-edge or a sloping plate. Then we ourselves turned off; and with a pall of cloud blanketing our heads and a shame-faced sun creeping under its edges to lick placatingly round our boots, we contoured once again close round below the southern precipices of the Matterhorn, and trudged over the Furggloch to Zermatt.

It was a fair beating, by an unforeseeable change of weather. And except for some regret at the time on Rudolf's account, and some for myself now that I can never become better acquainted with the noble east ridge of the Dent d'Hérens, it has left only desirable memories. The chivalrous good humour of many of the guides and amateurs; Rudolf's one-handed climbing, so masterly that I was only reminded of it by chance on the descent, when I was surprised to find myself in unconscious imitation using holds only for a single hand; and, even more, his poetic appreciation of his own mountains and of his unlooked-for return to the finest of them; old Peter Knubel's less reserved possessiveness, in the recall of a distant past; the mountain's changing moods, and their serio-comic reflection in the human incidents—all these made only good thinking, with never a twinge that could hurt.

On the occasion of the third failure—an attempt to cross all the summits between the Weisshorn and the Rothhorn in a single skyline flight—Josef had to be present. Of the several happenings in the Weisshorn hut the night before the ascent, Donald Robertson¹ has already written, and too divertingly to permit of a more prosaic version.

Under a high dawn, of frost-bearing west wind, the four of us coursed up the east ridge of the Weisshorn in some four hours.

So far 'we stayed not to rope: and we stopped not for stone.' The wind was too fiercely cold for a summit-drowse; so we roped up in pairs, and started down at once upon what was to prove the first descent of the Schalligrat. The frosted edges hummed in the wind, and the leviathan towers spouted snow above our heads. How grateful we were that the long diagonal traverses down the faces of the towers kept us upon the eastern and sheltered side! The gale, which was hammering the west flank into plates of ice, had blown much of the crest and of the eastern wall clear of snow. We manœuvred craftily behind the windscreen of turret and rock-mantlet, while we stretched our arms in welcome to the eastern sun, and our legs in its warmth. Down the steep cracks and sheltering scoops we squirmed and snuggled, blown into sky-high spirits by the heady, stinging air. It was still early in the day when we came out on the sharp, sparkling snow-crest of the Schallijoch. The wind barked in our ears, and bit them keenly. We ran a few feet down the wall on the windless side, and sat down on a snow bracket, for a baking half-hour of food and rest.

The contrast upon either side of that thin, high barrier of mountain wall! When I scrambled a few steps up the snow to peep over into the Val d'Anniviers, I was withered in ten seconds by the deadly cold of the wind. Icicles stiffened and clicked on my face, and my bones brittled with an icy ache. But when I looked back at my friends just below me, it was to see them crimsoning and opening their coats and shirts in a roast of sun heat.

Donald and the young guide Niklaus Brantschen—an excellent fellow with a quaint humour—left us here, to descend the glacier to Randa. As we had some hope that the wind would drop with the mounting sun, Josef and I stayed to watch them fighting their way down through the difficult icefall. Donald's big figure diminished to a speck; but Niklaus' enormous, bent-

¹ 'Alpine Journal,' XXV, p. 127.

knead lope remained visible as a motion long after the specks had lost distinctive colour and shape in distance.

Then we turned to the business of the day.¹ Before us, across the short white col, towered the rounded butt of the two-headed Schallihorn, green-grey marble, shattered and split, and riveted with ice. It had not until that day been ascended from this side, and the way was still to seek. In order to keep out of the wind as long as possible, Josef started a sensational move up one of the dissolute chimneys on its easterly curve. I liked it little—we had no time for exhibition turns!—so I struck up into the wind, crossed the line of the main ridge, and found a simpler if chillier way up the slippery mantelpieces of the norther-western corner. The frangible marble cracked and slithered under my boot-nails: it was a place for soft-soled shoes. Josef gratified me soon by following me; and himself, soon after, by passing me.

The wind really seemed to have fallen a little; and we met again, and crossed the fortified summits together, in company and in cheerful heart. But a check awaited us on the farther side. The sloping ridge-back down to the Ober Schallijoch should have been of sound snow. We found it wind-blown to a crust of hard ice. It was just too steep to walk down safely on ordinary nails. At the same time it was not steep enough to reconcile us to the long labour of cutting steps. With crampons we could have raced down it in ten minutes. As it was, it stole from us one and a half hours of irritating step-cutting, and tested our self-control almost unfairly.

Had we found the same iceslope on a lower glacier, we could have chanced it safely on our boot-nails and axes. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand we should neither of us have slipped. But it was just that one in a thousand chance which all our alpine training forbid us to risk—where the slope was not on a glacier, but above a mountain wall. Indolently as the angle went mooning downward, further below it slid roundly over, either way, above unthinkable depths. A man if he slipped might not have been able to check himself in time; and the other, without steps to 'anchor' from, might, with increasing probability, be dragged after him. Discipline prevailed. But as the margin of time melted away, and we were still hacking down our prim moral exercise, we raged at our own respectability, while we clung to it faithfully.

A little doubt of the day's issue in success, no larger than a man's hand, began to cloud upon the horizon. All our way

¹ Illus. facing p. 90.

was now in sight before us. Across the Ober Schallijoch the ruckled wind-edge of the ridge bent upward to the curved horn of the Momingspitze, black-tipped above its mane of cornice and snow. The gap behind it signified the dip of the Momingjoch. Beyond again, upon the next visible up-take of the ridge, jutted the firmer spire of the Mominghorn, darker in seeming and higher above the side-bays of falling glacier. And then, a long ribbon of upward crest mounted across the Ober Momingjoch to the massive shoulder of the Rothhorn. Once upon its fairway in good time, and we had no doubt of a royal canter over the peak, and down to Zermatt. Only a few days since we had come out upon it as the finish of a first ascent up the east face of the Rothhorn; and its detail, from the Ober Momingjoch to the summit, was still fresh in mind. But—could we reach it now in time?

Well, the present was problem and pleasure enough. We flung ourselves into the fair and square climbing of the snow-laden ridge. The Momingspitze stiffened its spine and bristled up its icy hackles expectantly. The parade of resistance was well-meant but thoughtless. Cornices to elude, ice-hackles to baffle, and snow-proud bastions to subdue, were superfluities that nibbled into the precious hours of afternoon. And with the turn of the day the westerly gale was once more on the war-path, riving and spending the armour of frost and snapping the broken sunbeams, now hot, now cold, about our blackened cheeks and temples. Its new onset prepared us for the blow of finding yet another froward ice-sheet on the far side of the Momingspitze, where we might have looked for helpful snow. None the less, the interest of the climbing consoled us for our fading prospect. Without even resentment I saw our hope of the Rothhorn retreat behind the warring companies of pinnacles and the batteries of wind: they were, at least, 'jolly opponents—every one!'

With Josef, happily, there was little need of plan-making far ahead. Decisions grew between us undiscussed; and we carried them out in action, even if action meant retreat, often without a word spoken. On this occasion the west wind had done all the talking for us; more than was called for. The Momingspitze was now behind us: the dip of the Momingjoch at our feet. It was clear that we could cross the Mominghorn ahead, and reach the top of the Rothhorn before dark. It was equally clear that at our present swift but hampered rate of progress we could not hope to be off the top of the Rothhorn

and down its exposed southern arête on the far side before night-fall. A night out in that penetrating wind was inconsistent with our respectable traditions. On principle, we carried few provisions and no reserve coverings, in order to travel the more lightly and finish off our programme the more certainly in the measure of daylight. We might not ask for it both ways ; or, when we failed on our chosen method, try to snatch a risky success by prolonging our legitimate day into the chances of an unnourished and unprotected night out.

But the day was not yet ended, and its sunny brilliance and activity were far too enjoyable for us to wish to shorten them even by one disappointed hour. As, bent almost double to lessen the wind-pressure, we battled along the white curving crest of the Momingjoch, I looked over and examined the confusion of its icefall to the Hohlicht glacier. Our traces of a few days before were still visible on the snow basin under the east face of the Rothhorn. It seemed to me certain that we could force a route down the ice from the pass, cross the Hohlicht glacier and the lower shoulder of the Rothhorn, and reach the Trift refuge, in any last few hours of light. We need not yet leave the sky. We had still time for the Mominghorn ; and, by repute, the ascent of its northern arête now facing us should make an ending worthy of the day. Tradition, it is true, gave four and a half hours for the ascent alone of this north ridge. We should have to be up—and down again—in less than that time, if we were to leave a free space for the sprint down and home. That was spur enough for a last lap over such country.

All care dropped from us with the unspoken abandonment of all long views. In the happy unity of purpose and of movement which anything over twelve hours of comrade-mountaineering can produce between two happy mortals, we sped at the ridge, exulting in every moment and motion. Our clothes were hard with snow-spin, our helmets rustled with breath-icicles. The wind scuffed about our heads and tore at the frozen muffled rope. But we bore it no grudge ; and the less, probably, because most of the steps and turrets lent themselves to sheltered turning-movements up the ledges and seams of the eastern face. Time fled from us. But we seemed indeed for those hours to have borrowed one of his wings ; and we ran him close upon the handicap.

At last, Josef looked round at me, meaningly. And still more meaningly I looked round at the sun, now level with us in the west. "The summit—just above !" Josef shouted across

the uproar of wind. He was crouching on the ramp of a frosted wall. I could see nothing higher beyond him; but I did not even join him to make sure. We had not another five spare minutes in our pockets to wager on the event. I turned round, and began to climb down.

Time may have lent us his second wing for that descent. If not, after-time has smoothed out the kinks and twists and struggles of each moment into a memory of continuous flight. The wind shrilled support under our feet, and bore up our frozen coats like parachutes. We swooped pass-ward; and the white faces of the glaciers rose steadily to meet us. The sharp indented ridge, cog below cog and nick below nick, swept up towards us, passed under us, and on and up into the sky behind, as though we had been sliding down over a giant wheel. Below, and continuing it, stretched the backbone of our long day's journeying, a vista of now friendly peaks. On either side of its straight recession the roll of the opposite glaciers lifted at our approach, discovering an evening contrast between their reflections of the eastern and the western light. Beyond the pent of these glaciers, on either hand, the shadow-bands that marked the forested valleys grew ever narrower for our descent, ever darker for that of the sun. And in them, also, there was the same evening contrast. For on their eastern slopes the last sunset tints over snow-hollow and woodland and alp were blown to a barbaric restlessness of colour, burnished almost to incandescence, by the gusty kindling of the gale.

On the Momingjoch once again, we turned our backs upon the wind and the sunset, stamped down its easterly snow wall, and dived among the hollows and billows of steep cascading ice. It is a gallant tilt of a pass, a pleasure to thrust an ice-axe into in an honourable passage of arms and feet. Luck, or Josef, guided us to the right chink in its mighty bergschrund; and we came out upon the Hohlicht basin late enough for the shadows to have chilled its even snow. The crisp surface-crunch made a lilt for our feet.

A switchback of descent after a great climb has merits of its own. Too sudden a drop from a mountain, just as it deafens our ear to common sounds, surprises the ear of our mind disturbingly, which has been attuned for long hours to the inter-course with clean height and sky. The result is a vague intolerance of the returning valley regime, and of our neighbour, which is often mistaken for the effect of fatigue. On the other hand, an up or down over a ridge or two, although it may seem

tiresome to our muscles at the moment, acts as a wholesome spiritual acclimatization. I comforted myself in this fashion as we trudged up to the rise where the low eastern shoulder of the Rothhorn was reaching its arm of night across our homeward way. It proved indeed a relief, of rubble and rock. We crossed it, not ungratefully, and glissaded down over snow, slab and scree indiscriminatingly to the Rothhorn glacier. With a stride that lengthened and quickened with the lengthening shadows we skirted upon the long moraines down to the Trift gorge, and trailed into Zermatt even before the laggard train had brought Donald and Niklaus up the few miles of valley to meet us.

It had been another good failure; a straight defeat by not unusual circumstance. The head of our ambition had been cut off too cleanly for resentment, by the edge that divides what is possible from what is impossible in sound mountaineering. What was left to us was all a body of unsmirched satisfaction, without hole or corner, blemish or regret: a full length of day, and a joy to recall.

Josef Knubel, in our reminiscent hut talks, used to make a great deal of play with our repulse upon the col des Nantillons. Because, as he maintained, it was the only time we ever failed in an all-out attack upon a 'limited objective.' It cannot be classed with the 'ridge' attempts. But, as a notable failure, it may share the pomp of their funereal company, even as it shared something of their hostile circumstance: and the more so because it was adorned by a remarkable feat of climbing on Josef's part which deserves to be rescued from oblivion—if only among the epitaphs and plumes.

Donald Robertson, George Mallory, Josef and I, with a second guide, 'Peter'—one of the unsuccessful experiments—were encamped on the moraine beside the Mer de Glace, under the precipices of the Charmoz. It was a plausible-looking gîte, a fallen boulder under which we could creep as into a cave, up a sloping floor of stones. At its lower end a tiny bubble of silver spring sprayed among green moss, and caught the slant of moonlight at night in fairy fashion.

We had designs upon the vast cirque of the Aiguilles about us. First among them we had placed the ascent of this side of the col des Nantillons.¹ Of the two huge couloirs which finish upon either side of a rock tooth aloft upon the col we had chosen the nearer, northern one for the attempt, because it was still

¹ Illus. facing p. 160.

unknown. The other had been already tampered with on the descent by a party crossing the pass in the opposite direction.

Three nights we passed under our rock: two of them in exceeding discomfort. It was, I think, the second evening which stormed us back from an exploration with minute guns of thunder. The walls of the Aiguilles caught the explosions, and drummed them back and across in devastating echoes. Our great rock shook continuously over our heads. We felt the sound droning through us. For the throttled glacier was acting as a colossal organ-pipe, filled with vibrations pitched too low for a human ear; and—we were inside the organ-pipe. In counter-time the lightning flashed fabulously, making a quicksilver mirror of the uneasy spring beyond our curled-up toes. Further and further we crept up into the hollow under the rock. But the nomad rain-trickles followed us up the vaulting of the cave—

And every little circlet where they fell
Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres
And intertangled lines of light.

Water, I discovered then, can run uphill, provided that it is on the underside of anything. We did not sleep. We lay, as Donald records, like Caiaphas in the Inferno—'haughtily silent.' At intervals we slipped down upon one another's reproaches, as we wriggled off the stone-jags which sprouted under us as thickly as weeds after rain.

Day peered bleakly in at us, up the cavern mouth, over a spread of fresh snow which put climbing out of the question. But Donald was of a stature and of a temperament that rejoiced in long portages of new provender from the distant Montenvers. So we braved another night under the rock. It was a steamy and a cloudy one, punctuated by rock avalanches. Three times, about the coming of the dawn wind, I sent out Peter as a reluctant dove. Each time he crawled back, muttering—"The grey cloud covers the sky." Something rhythmical in the monotony of his refrain touched a chord in memory. Perhaps he, too, was a Sir Bedivere! "No stars?" I asked the last time. "Only three this time, that I could see," he moaned, and curled down again among the 'dewy pebbles.' An alpine morning cloud through which stars can be seen is not, I may say, usually treated as an excuse for staying a-bed. "A hand, a voice, a motion of the mere"—followed this time for Peter, surely enough: and in a few seconds we were all afoot.

How do men ever get under way in these dark hours?—

when everything we want is irretrievable from the safe ledge we found for it after the convivial evening meal: when we ourselves are only yawns and churlish chuffs, in a jumble of unsorted limbs and rain-mouldy boots and ropes; and when we set to work to straighten our bodies fearfully in our all-night clothes, lest we may feel more inches of their clammy inwardness revolt our sleepy-thirsty skin!

"Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," we wound grudgingly up the broken subsidiary glacier. It is a surly satisfaction at such moments to put off as long as possible the return of our good humour; which we yet know, all the time, is bound to come with sun-up. At the steep apex of the glacier we entered the portals of the couloir, and the gates of its cavernous shadow closed behind us.

The difficulties began at once; and it was not long before they had scraped off the vapours of night and our distaste for ourselves as with a strigil. Then the rock walls stooped over out of balance to oversee our invasion, and for a section the couloir became unclimbable. A hundred feet above our heads on the left we could see the open end of a confluent gully. But to reach this no better way offered than a desperately vertical crack, a half-hearted slit down the back of a wrinkle up the smooth wall.

To my admiration, Josef at once determined to try this. Two of us, standing on ledges on the face, made a jumping-off place for him upon our heads and axes; from which he could squeeze a finger or two into the lower end of the slit. Then we held on to our breath and our holds while we watched his amazing fly-cling upward. For forty feet his only hold appeared to be the pick of his axe, which he jammed at intervals into the partly-overhanging crack, and then pulled himself up to its level by sheer arm strength. For the trepidant seconds while he was freeing the axe and hooking it higher in the slit, he bridged his body across the open wrinkle, a shoulder pressed against one, and a foot sticking by friction to its other outward-sloping wall. It was an astonishing feat. Not once did I see him waste strength by scraping for a non-existent foothold or fumble the lightning shift of the axe. About fifty feet up he managed to break out to his left on to some sort of rock foot- and hand-hold. And the hollow immensity of the couloir whispered like St. Paul's with the sigh of our company below drawing breath again. But it was not until he had worked back towards the couloir, and on to a bracket full ninety feet above our heads,

that he found a rock bollard where he could anchor, and bring up the rest of us—on the rope.

I shall be describing something like this again in the account of a Grépon climb. There is indeed a sameness in all stories told afterwards of athletic feats and fights. But the best thrills in our lives come when we take part in them, or when we watch them—with a very personal concern in their result. The purity of the thrill is qualified where man is the opponent of man in game or combat. Sympathy is then apt to intrude as an alloy as soon as one side begins to look like losing. But our feeling at the sight of a fellow human in conflict with impersonal forces, mountain or sea or wind, is undiluted. We appreciate the quiescent beauty and the gigantic permanence of the mountain all the more for its contrast with the mobile, invincible grain of mortality disputing factiously with it. But our sympathy is with the man, wholly and all the time. The thrill of these combats is single and unblemished, and the thought of them sounds on for us afterwards like echoes from the clear note of a horn.

Three of the party followed the more direct line of the hanging rope, swarming up it, and up the slabs, in the manner of steeple-jacks. But Josef had left his axe hooked near the top of the slit, away out to the left. So the spare rope was swung out for my use across the overhung wall, once and again, until it caught over the corner of the wrinkle. I was not sorry to have the excuse for wrestling with his original route and judging of its difficulties. I clung to the spare rope throughout with frank enthusiasm. Even so, and with another round my waist, I found thirty feet of the vertiginous wrinkle perhaps the stiffest piece of climbing I have—not done! I could not make a workmanlike job of those one-foot, one-shoulder bridges. And the slit down the back of the wrinkle overhung. And all the walls of all the Aiguilles leaned out and laughed at me.

To continue up the dank main gully did not attract us; no more did its abortive tributary on the left. But the rough red slabs up the edge of the buttress between them offered us freedom and air, eked out by an occasional hold. The hours passed agreeably. There is no more entertaining company for a warm day than russet Chamonix granite, as it bends over in the heat of the argument to impress its points never more than a few inches from our face. It has always a problem to occupy our mind at the moment, and yet it is always holding out a prospect of giving up the argument in our favour a few rope-

lengths ahead. The buttress steepened. It was, we could assume, pulling itself together for its final 'And now!' of the discourse, in the rock tusk on the pass.

And then suddenly I noticed that the crags had dulled and chilled. A silt of black-hearted cloud leaked over us, dividing and multiplying out of the gloomy caverns from which we had fled. In an unnoticed half-hour the weather had 'made' ominously, with the quickness of change that characterizes weather smuggled over the Italian frontier. "Wass denken Sie, Herr Jung?" came Josef's mild and gloomy voice out of the dun-coloured cloud above. Malignant sprites replied. A storm of tropical hail crashed upon us, and in a minute the slabs were racing with ice pebbles. Such things happen in *aiguille*-climbing. In a breath a climb, difficult, but sound enough to leave us a margin of safety, had been changed to a dangerous cling, with chilled extremities, upon treacherous holds. Any fall of temperature—and it was to be expected—might freeze the moisture into an ice-glaze: with results we dared not contemplate.

I looked up through the fling of hail and murk. The steepening buttress under such conditions must not be attempted—the higher we approached towards the pass wind, the greater the likelihood of finding ourselves at any moment a-slither on deadly *verglâs*. Could we compromise by crossing into the great couloir on our right?

Where we were, this traverse was impossible. But after descending some distance—on oh, such different slabs!—we managed to circle on a descending line across the granite boiler-plates towards the couloir. We craned over to look into and up it. It was a roaring ladder of waterfall—the very drain of the drowned slabs. And yet—and yet—the crescent of slab above the left wall of the chasm hooped upward not unpromisingly into the denser mist, where not far above us the dip of the snow-pass must lie! Dared we try it? The alternative was to go down over the thousands of feet of wet, undercut precipice: with the fearsome slit in the wall waiting for us at the end, over a murmur of unseen glacier. On the other hand, if we did press on up the dripping slabs, one very little gap in the chain of possibility would arrest us for the night on the slippery crockets and wall-dints. It was the choice between a hundred certain but known dangers below, and one possible but fatal risk above.

With a dreary foreboding, but no doubt, I shook the rope downward, in signal for descent. Soon every other thought was

lost in the excitement of the struggle. Cold and slime had by now ruled out ninety per cent of the positions from which on the ascent one man had been able to secure the next. There was nothing for it but to use the slow and laborious method of the 'Long rope' for all the height. Each of us in turn roped singly, descended alone—sometimes as much as a hundred and fifty feet—until he reached one of the rare 'better' ledges, and there untied, for another to follow. Josef came down last, doubling the spare rope round any hitch that served, and lowering himself. When no hitch offered, he kept Peter near him for the use of his head or hand.

But Peter was of little use during these critical hours, except as a voice. He scrabbled insecurely. From ledges a hundred feet below, where we poised unroped, it was alarming to hear the flustered shouts overhead, to see the two little figures agitating the mist, and count the failures on crucial passages to give to Josef's groping boot the shoulder or hand it needed. At one point the three of us were pinned precariously, and unroped, on such a ledge, when the nervous squeaks above changed to a yell; and a big rock, loosened by Peter's *ventre-à-pierre* methods, spun out of the clouds and hurtled down at us. None of us could stir off our holds. I watched it falling with the sense of detachment that belongs to these passive moments. It pitched between two of us with the crack of a shell, and whistled into fragments over further space.

Donald and George led the grim descent throughout with unruffled efficiency. Without a single false move they retraced our complicated line of the morning, down slabs in most evil condition, and of which never more than a few feet at a time could be seen from above. Their example could not fail to steady the nerves of our much-tried followers. It was trying enough for the men below to have to cling for half-hours at a time, unroped and in sleet, to cold and greasy mouldings while the others were descending separately to their own unchancy halting-places. But Josef had the additional strain of holding the rope for all of us through enervating pauses, with the prospect of having eventually to follow down himself without its protection. These are times when the last man keeps an anxious eye on the pace with which the rope is running out from his hand over the few inches of rock in his view. If ever it slows or checks, one more unpleasantness is foreshadowed for his own unaided descent.

The thought of the villainous drop into the last gulf was

always there, damping the relief we felt as the hours passed and we found ourselves still safely crawling down between the sandwich-boards of dank mist without and slimy wall within. When at last we gathered on the pulpit above the bottomless pit, I looked over and down into its bottle-neck, and could feel only incredulous that anyone should ever have thought of climbing out of it.

But we had plenty of rope. We doubled three hundred spare feet of it round the bollard, and with a second waist-rope for security, slipped in turn over the grey lip, to swing like bird-nesting cragsmen downward into the updraft of rain and darkness.

After that, the remaining rocks of the couloir seemed only five-finger exercises. Drenched, defeated, but light of heart, we ran down on to the glacier, and stumbled along its forth-right surface to Chamonix.

There is an odd by-path of impression opened up by these descents on to more or less horizontal surfaces. For hours that spell years we may have been moving vertically up and down, on the face of an upright earth. Every faculty has been concentrated upon adjusting our struggle for existence to the law of a two-dimensional space. The sudden change on to a 'level' surface seems to us at first abnormal, a contradiction of our habit of life. Nature, we feel, has upset her own reasonable order, projected herself into a new lateral dimension under our feet. She has thrust out an artificial buffer for us athwart the upright-downright arrangement of the universe. We trip on its interference unexpectedly. But our surprise is not ungrateful; because the drag of expectant space, always below us, can become in time an enemy as personal and insistent as death. The intervention, therefore, seems providential, although irregular. After experiencing a number of these abrupt translations from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional earth I found it less difficult to conceive of a fourth dimension. Just so relieved, and yet confused at first, might some philosopher feel, who in a normal and horizontal promenade towards dissolution suddenly found himself projected vertically and miraculously into a new and other-dimensional form of existence, cheating every convention of his straightforward life and the level assumptions upon which his philosophy had been based.

A week later, after crossing the Grépon, I looked down from the col des Nantillons; and I recognized, but a few hundred feet below, the hoop of slab above the couloir from which we had turned back. It would have gone well enough—as others

have since proved. But our decision had been the only right one under the circumstances ; there had been no personal shortcoming, and I felt no shadow of remorse. On the contrary, the thought of that collar of unclimbed crag below the pass gave me a pleasure which only increased with time. What the cliffs had given us had been enough, and to spare, for one day and one party. It was right that there should remain some crowning reward of novelty, to tempt others to follow on such stimulating courses.

I wonder why we liked, and liked others to like, such scenes and such throes—in the years before we discovered any meaning in what the mountains were doing for us? It would seem a savage taste ; and yet primitive peoples did not feel the attraction. Why should no view have had any friendly interest for me in those years unless it rushed up somewhere into mountains, and big ones? River and fen, meadow-land and forest, they belonged to a domesticated or garden order of beauty. For the sort of people who preferred them—they were the sort of thing they preferred : tame, tolerable souls, I could feel only an impatient pity for their preference. If in passing the lake or the down on my way to the hills, I paid them the customary tribute, and willingly, it was the sixpence which we pay as children at the turnstile which admits us to the marvels of the Show inside. More than the fee I never thought of offering : largesse began where the hills began.

Has perhaps this passion for height and breadth—for mountain, ocean or desert—which we are accustomed to associate with the desire of the eye, some less apparent origin in the sense of touch, the craving to handle and possess ; which, as it is one of the earliest senses to develop in a child, some of us may retain childishly late? For us, contact, possession, must always complete the pleasure prepared by the eye. Even the promise of it is sufficient, if the promise in view is conspicuous enough to be convincing. Thus, the spaces of water, if they are large enough, the evidences of wind if they are big enough, suggest upon sight the feeling which, otherwise, only the actual touch of open water or of high wind can give us. Great mountains resist us, physically, even in their distant view. But we cannot wrestle in prospect with the daisies we see on a lawn, or envisage personal contact with all the trees of a rural view or the crowded details of a panorama in perspective. It is only the greater objects in nature which have this tactile sug-

gestion for us, the power to confound two senses in one, and appeal through the eye to the passion, dominant in a few, to handle and possess.

I only suggest this as perhaps the least likely of a hundred explanations for the mountain—or the seafaring instinct.

As data for yet another, and possibly a truer one, I may record again that one type of scenery, these barbarous ridges and horrid rocks, I felt to be inherently friendly, and in some rude fashion akin to me. The nursery-gardens of 'pomp and pleasure' below their level were strangers, for all their better manners. As a boy, so long as the last stone wall or spruce plantation remained in sight, there could be no ease, no home-likeness:

But where the hills rush darkly up the night,
when the moor widens with a moon of rain,—

there and then came the freedom of a home-coming, the liberty to be just oneself, among a circle of intimates with a fraternal right to bully or tease.

Translated in a later year to the Alps this 'sanctuary' feeling began at a higher level, among a mountain kindred of even rougher traditions. Glaciers of approach and trodden peaks might delight others—they were always worth the sixpenny-worth of appreciation due at a turnstile! But I thought of even them only as avenues, giving access to the fierce intercourse of height, to the boisterous play and the 'platform wild' of height's 'heroic children'; a platform companionable but, it might be, often untenable.

It was a natural selectiveness which profited me more than I deserved. We cannot be wholly devoted to one enthusiasm without learning something about the nature of all enthusiasm; and without in the end grounding at least a respect for all objects and pursuits, however originally unsympathetic to us, which arouse a like devotion in others. In this way the years of a chase restricted to high mountains were doubly kind. Not only did they considerably leave all the more approachable wonders of the world as tracts of novel discovery for a later period; they also developed the capacity to understand and to admire, in all its fullness. The appreciation of that which was lovely in nature or in human creation gained rather than lost in vigour and adaptability by the long intensive training. It had broadened into a reasonably catholic taste for all things bright and beautiful, and even wise and wonderful, by the time the licence to hunt at will the feral Questing Beast through his mountain fastnesses was withdrawn.

CHAPTER VII

WEISSHORN WAYS

There is a hill that stands for me
beyond the sunset and the sea,—
a ladder of light ascending :
when I have crossed the evening ray
and lost my comrade of white day,
it beckons to me, bending
a mountain way of wind and rain
to draw my feet from the dark plain.
Where stars of slumber kindle on its crest,
my hill, the high hill, from wandering to rest.

WE used to take fine weather for granted: possibly too much for granted for our climbing good. The Alps thought better of their standing arrangement for a fine summer every year, and sulked behind a snow and fog screen of several bad-weather seasons. It was disappointing. But no doubt it was intended as a warning to us to bethink ourselves, and to study how to economize the flood of success by contributing our own checks of graduated difficulty. Novelty unhusbanded could not last the pace; nor the cruse of alpine adventure be kept brimming if we tapped it in too many obvious quarters at once.

The warning may have been needed; but it was, if anything, overdone. Mountains are fond of extremes. It became discouraging rather than cautionary to have to wait week after week for the rising of an old grey army-blanket of mist, the more damping because of the ominous shreds of new wet snow showing behind its rents: and to be herded the while behind the barriers of hotel-terraces or in the gangways of valley-bottoms.

In the neighbourhood of these sixpenny turnstiles, even among the Alps we cannot escape from the ugly advertisements of a civilization that is crowding in with us. During waiting weeks of fog we could not be deaf to the busy clucking of engines multiplying through the gorges, where the river voices swelled our protest with an indignant chant—"Line upon line—line

upon line!" For other weeks of storm we must feel—for we could not see—the shapeliest and, alas, the all too popular peaks fretting their drapery of fixed ropes and wire ladders against the snow-wind, and bemoaning themselves in antiphone to our moan—"Woe unto them that draw up sins with cords, and iniquity as it were with a cart-rope!" Were we to be driven to look for our adventure further afield?

I spent a Walpurgis Nacht in the caravanseraï on the Brocken, assailed by little demons other than those mentioned by Goethe. From the lightning-shattered chapel, half filled with snow, on the summit of Mount Athos, we listened to a gale piping in the great gulleys of the north face, and drank herb tea brewed by a wild-haired hermit as solitary and talkative as Time. I looked for the greatness of Hymettus from Lycabettus, and of Lycabettus from Hymettus. From Athos, and again from Parnassus, we designed cloud-climbs upon Olympus, adrift midway between a uniform sea and sky. Up the long snows of the other Olympus in Asia we toiled, with the red roofs and marble-white minarets of Brusa disappearing among green mulberry-trees at our feet. Alone upon Mount Ida, from the rock throne of Zeus I looked northward, where Scamander burst from grey rocks and olive-groves out over the levels of wind-enchanted Troy. On my left lay a crystal blue of the Ægean infringing with white surf the floating pink petals of innumerable eyots; while to the south the uplands of Asia melted into a desert distance of sun-coloured mist. And there I first discovered how greatly the desert shares the fascination of the sea and the mountains, and why it does so. Latmos we crossed on a perilous ride, courting the moon recklessly—for our own small purposes of travel—under the very nose of pursuing Endymion, a pock-marked, barefoot and turbaned brigand with a blush-rose stuck behind his ear.

But the Alps survived the test. No oriental colouring of cliff, no contrast of snow, summit and surf, of past legend and present savage seclusion, could efface the memory of their perfect proportions—just high enough and difficult enough for a full day of human enterprise between night and sunset. Their adventure had found no rival, in its seemliness and constancy. No weather, no vulgarization, and—most certain of all—no absence could succeed for more than a moment in clouding their romance. Any summer—perhaps the very one we were missing—might prove to have been *the* summer among them! Once above the scenic turnstiles, we had only to avoid the snowfield trampled into buffalo-wallows and the rock ridges pink with

the polish of frequent feet, and wisps of the old magic would begin to gather again about their untrodden ways. A mountaineer-errant had but bear among them as his device the 'good and godly' distich of James V,—

Brother, hearken what I say :
Grip ere thou slide, and—keep forth the high-way—

and he could remain secure of himself, and safe of his alpine romance. Let him but put into his mountaineering as much of spirit and independence as he drew from it of inspiration and pleasure, and the Alps would have no need to call upon accidents like the weather to hedge in their store. Even one peak, I began to realize, climbed in this the right spirit might retain, to the twentieth and the hundredth ascent, all its charm and most of its mystery.

And of all mountains the Weisshorn, to me, promised the most ; from all points of view—with one possible exception—fulfilling our ideal of a mountain. Three, and unlike, are the great edges of its glorious pyramid ; and threefold, and strikingly dissimilar, are the aspects of its western, easterly and northerly faces. The western face is of furrowed rock, prognathous. It conceals its height in uneven length, and diverts our interest left and right towards its mountain neighbours. Upon this face lies the serpent rib which I had climbed with the Theytaz. The southerly face, a triangular shield, races to the sky in upright lines of exquisite lightness. It, too, points a further way, but only to cloud-land. The northern aspect is a storm-cone of snow, in line faultlessly composed, self-contained, and content to hold our eye within its assertion of complete mountain form. In all, I think, I stood upon the symmetrical summit eight times ; reaching it by six different lines, four of them new, and leaving it again by four different lines, three of them first descents.

The ribbed, southerly shield which it holds high above Zermatt proved early an irresistible challenge. In the wet seasons I spent many hours upon that idler's passe-partout the Riffelhorn, fervently giving way to its temptation. Then the occasion came to fall to it.

Upon the Furgg-grat of the Matterhorn I had joined forces with V. J. E. Ryan, an Indian in his swift and soundless going and a mighty hunter of mountain heads. We arranged to collaborate in like manner on an ascent of the Schalligrat of the Weisshorn, from a gîte on the Schalliberg glacier. The weather wept at our mean spirit—the ridge had already then,



Schalijoch

WEISSHORN
Southern Face

I think, been twice visited—and harried us down to the Weiss-horn hut and to chess-playing; and thence, with still more insulted tears, to Randa. There we happened upon Sir Edward Davidson, good friend to all good mountaineering, who made straight the way of temptation by supplying me with the history of all previous attempts upon the southerly face. We returned to the hut. The weather still wept; but now I felt certain it was with joy over our new and better resolve.

Ryan's steely wakefulness got us started in defiance of the night mist and the over-night hesitation of the guides. Up to the Schalliberg glacier we plodded steadily, a mere matter of "boots, boots, boots, boots, going up and down again." Rumour had told us that in order to mount on to a cross-ridge or buttress, which acts as a weir between two levels of this glacier, we must find a rift in its wall, an ice-trickled sluice. Nobody seems to have succeeded in exactly locating this, or at least in making any one account of it correspond with any other. To reach this uncertainty we struck upward, north-west, across the eastern bay of the glacier, threading the crevasses at a high level. And then, descending slightly, we climbed on to the great split buttress or weir by an easy breach. We hoped it was the right rift, and pushed ahead, to avoid remark.

The upper edge of the buttress was too uninterrupted to pause upon; until the rock gave out under hanging snowslopes, as a suitable reminder of breakfast. Thereafter, a left-handed diagonal up this steep snow led us into the mouth of the big 'Mathews' couloir. But our aspiring diagonal swept on unheeding, crossed the bergschrund, and shelved us on the undercliff of a rib to the left of the couloir. It was the second of the ribs which descend, in low relief, from the east arête of the Weisshorn to the Schalliberg glacier. The corduroy of rib and snow on this face is unusually confusing, and an attempt to be precise perhaps best reproduces the effect. For half an hour we made use of this upright: it was solid, serviceable ware for all its ice-glaze and snow-stippling. Then we slanted across a depression on to the next rib to the west; travelled upward upon it for a time; and then inclined west again up the face. As nearly as possible we were making a direct route to the summit; and the ribs were not in alignment with it.

So far we had been following each other in close order, but unroped. But at approximately nine hundred feet below the summit the angle of the face steepened deterrently: the rocks smoothed out their good frictional wrinkles, and snow-puff and

ice-salve had been brushed over them with a lavish hand. We halted, and roped in our respective parties. Ryan with his two Lochmatters led the van ; a minority of Knubel and myself followed, varying the line as our reach suggested. We began with a cling of caution up to the left. There followed another easy-going upright wrinkle ; and then yet another careful passage upward, over a shallow depression. Finally, some two hundred feet below the summit, a fine figure of a slab grew tired of the slight pretence at inclination, and stood up stoutly as a declared precipice. I let Josef run out his full seventy feet of rope, before I followed him on its upward traverse. Minute holds there were, at inter-stellar distances ; but at half the height one had been left out. I bungled here for some time, much puzzled how Josef, whose reach was considerably shorter than mine, could have passed the absence of hold seemingly without hesitation. At last I found it, a sole-supporting ledgeling on the underside of a glazed plate. Josef grinned down at me from above as I exclaimed, and used it. And I misquoted at him a proverb which other rock-climbers may have blushed to recall in like circumstances—that “ to know-ledge is better than reach-is.”

Up a last broken column of rock we pelted direct for the summit, and broke through the final snowcrest I hazarded five, but Ryan proved by demonstration three feet from the highest point.

For six and a half hours the Weissshorn had endured our scratchings upon its stainless shield, loyally on the defensive, and using no help from stone-fall or from weather. Now it loosed a shaft of keen wind in our faces, and set a snowcloud behind it. But none the less we felt we owed to its crest a few minutes of grateful contemplation, and to ourselves the food for which the interest of the climb had left us no time : for we had

Found hard rocks, hard cheer, or none ;
And we were emptier than a friar's brains.

We looked down over the several corners of the pyramid, to choose a way of descent. But the quick volleying of the wind made the ordinary east ridge our only reasonable choice. And even that made for us difficulties enough. The pursuing gusts buffeted our shoulders, while the dry powder-snow stole away furtively with our feet. We turned down off the ridge at the earliest point, and thought to conciliate the propulsive movement of both wind and snow by sitting into a long glissade

down to the glacier. "A man may, I graunt, sit on a brante hill-syde, but yf he gyye never so lytle forward he cannot stoppe though he woulde never so fayne, but he must nedes runne heedling, he knoweth not how far." Roger Ascham is rarely wrong. I did "gyve a lytle forward" as I sat and slid, was driven incontinent to my feet by the check, and "ranne heedling" until I shot headlong across the well-covered schrund, in an attitude familiar in itself but which never loses its freshness of humour for the spectators.

The rest of the way was only not boring because glimpses of the boulder-heaps and wasteland far below us were picked out of their setting in the gloom of the valley by a limelight of copper-foil sun-down: glimmering erratically, like patches of a goblin dancing-floor they jumped up and down half way between our eyes and the vague nether darkness to which they belonged. Randa we reached in about half the time we had spent upon the ascent from the hut, and in a twilit contentment.

The Shining Wall of the Weisshorn did not lose its inward light of enchantment for the one breach we had made in it. A year later as I watched the wind-ice on the far side of the east ridge reflected up on to the sky, and the jets of snow spinning erect above its rock embrasures, it seemed to me no less than a duty to devote another day to demonstrating how sheltered was our southerly face, as compared with this exposed eastern ridge hitherto preferred for the ascent.

Mayor, Josef and I repeated the start of the year before; although we found the rift-sluice—or was it yet another one?—which led on to the forked buttress leaking with a greater hindrance of ice. We had agreed that Mayor, no less than the kindly shelter of the face on a blustering day, deserved the honour of an entirely new ascent. So we chose from afar the most easterly of the descending ribs. To be precise again—it is the rib which forms the western wall of the 'Mathews' couloir; and we had flitted across it on the last occasion, preferring its westerly neighbour as the more direct start for a line up the centre of the shield.

The steep snow-slopes below the couloir met the swish of the axe with just the right crisp obstinacy, and rewarded each swish with a formal triumph of a step. An equally correct-minded ice-slope came just where it ought, slanting us smoothly on to the side of our rib. The rib itself, a leaning pillar of rock in low relief, did also all that it might to help us upward, in

still sunshine. At two-thirds of its height it joined hands with its westerly neighbour; and from their handclasp stood up a bunch of gnarled weather-browned fingers, upon which Mayor grouped himself statuesquely. Above, the two continued as a single ridge, inclining westward and upward, to an untroubled end on the east arête.

It was all sunny and fortunate; and as we looked up, and saw the snow smoking over the arête above, and the frozen ropes and the bodies of another party upon its crest bending stiffly with and against the gale, we dawdled all the more among our placid sun-tanned rocks with their pleated ruffs and cuffs of bland white snow; and, I am afraid, enjoyed them all the more for the contrast. Once our own heads had topped the snow-coping, of course we came in for our turn of the arctic wind. It was not for long; for our southern wall had nursed us up to a point within a quarter of an hour of the summit. But even in those few minutes we had time to become parti-coloured as Pierrots, one side all white, the other its usual nondescript.

We hammered down the ten thousand feet to Randa in less time than before; and as we went we altered our coloration like chameleons. Upon the ridge we had been clicking in a glacial mail: thudding down the moraines and the zig-zags through the fir trees we steamed coldly from our darkening brown dampness; and we were all clotted and grey-duffled with parching dust by the time we had reassumed our worser selves among the stuffy valley pastures.

Three are the ridges of the Weisshorn pyramid; and they had all by this time been traversed upward and downward, and with variations. Threefold are the faces between the ridges; and upon two of them, west and south, we had done all that seemed to our sort of generation reasonable. One face alone remained, the bending snow wall of the north, which makes the glory of the Weisshorn as we view its pre-eminence from the Oberland or from the east. This face had a past. The definition of the previous attempts upon it—always an absorbing preliminary to a new climb—gave me much additional fun at the time. But the conclusions need not be disinterred. Sufficient that they left us a clean white sheet of novelty to work our will upon; four thousand feet of snow wall, rock-buttressed below and silver-blue with hanging glaciers above, so withdrawn and high as to be visible only from opposite and distant ranges.

In days when there remained few new ascents, the few who

attempted them were bound to come across each other's traces ; and the rivalry often ended, as it should, in collaboration. The Furggen ridge of the Matterhorn had provided one such—to me—memorable partnership. The north face of the Weiss-horn discovered the persistent tracks of Oliver Perry Smith. We had already met upon the Grépon ; where the relish with which he handled several inches of new snow on rock holds had made Knubel's and my perishing fingers ache yet more to watch. He had been also one of Knubel's first friends in the wood-chopping days. Our combination, for any fresh attempt upon the north face, seemed preordained. We annexed a gigantic and humble-minded Brantschen from Randa, and set out on an afternoon up the bluff front of the Bruneghorn.

Our porter had declared that we should find an excellent sleeping-place on the shoulder, in fact a perfect 'Balm.' We had reached a point only some two and a half hours of sultry ascent above the valley : but our packs were heavy, the evening threatened rain, and the very word Balm held a promise of sleep. Josef, Perry Smith, and I sat down to wait for him, resting on our heavy sacks and each embracing an armful of withered silvery juniper-roots, collected far above the tree-line for firewood.

The porter appeared over the edge below us, blotting out the valley, enormous in bulk, with a sunset face grinning from a halo of hair and of twisted roots piled high on his pack. He was sent off to find the Balm ; while the voice of comfort, which cried of rain and of the probable necessity of a two nights' camp, out-shouted the whisper of conscience which bid us sleep at least two hours farther up, on some bare ledge beside the glacier.

The Balm, when we reached it, following the joyous cacklings of the porter, was more romantic than reassuring : a cleft in the hillside some hundred feet high, with a floor of boulders and grass-bumps sloping up steeply to the angle of the meeting walls. The clouds of a lowering evening served for only roof. The porter set to work to pile a bright fire. Josef unpacked our supplies into dark and greedy rock-crevices, which swallowed them totally when the light failed. Cortez and I—we called him Cortez because circumstances interfered with his living longer in America—perched on a jutting rock and discussed the morrow's campaign.

Our marsh-green shoulder of hill stood out like a landing from a stairway of precipices, which mounted towards the snow-

covered peaks of the Brunegghorn half-hidden in cloud above. Three thousand feet below us the chequering of white hotels and dusky chalets was growing indistinct in a back-wash of shadow. Beside us, in a gorge, a hanging fall of glacier ended incongruously among the verdure. And high above it, beyond the rim of the glacier-basin from which the fall had plunged, rose the silver spire of the Weisshorn, rock-ribbed and cloud-capped, signalling to us a dazzling warning of freshly fallen snow.

A cold wind, and the call to hot soup, chocolate and the remarkable sequence of a camp meal, ended our airy speculation, such as is usually described in a chronicle as a 'careful previous examination.' The porter refused to eat, and piled mattresses of green juniper-brush in our chosen corners, crooning monotonous patois. Josef we drew into a debate as to why natives from villages three miles apart should talk different dialects, a problem that often served to distract his impressionable mind from ill-weather portents. And then it was time to retreat with the last pipe into our sleeping-sacks.

It is only the inexperienced or the prosaic who sleep within sight or sound of one another in a bivouac. The charm of a night in the open is its release from humanity, the feeling that a kindly earth is thrusting us up as we lie cosily on the front of time for an impersonal talk with stars and clouds. Even the suspicion that we are within range of a snore drowns the music of the spheres and frightens away the privacy of space.

From where I lay on my juniper-ledge I looked out across my feet into the chasm of glacier-fall. By daylight the variety of ice is subdued to a simple contradiction between white bosses and staring blue clefts. Now at the approach of darkness the prominences rippled with graduated lighting, pearl and ivory and opalescent, and the shadowy depressions varied infinitely in tone, from pale turquoise to violet or indigo. Dusk drew the eddies and arabesques of ice in clearer outline, and the moonlight, filtering here and there through the clouds, sowed dragon's teeth of silver round the yawn of more deeply graven crevasses. The murmur of the glacier, which by day had been escaping the ear as a single undercurrent of sound, now in the stillness of night grew loud with startling voices, cries of anger, of inarticulate triumph, and long tuneless chanties. It is a ghostly clamour, that night-shouting of glaciers, sufficient to account for the superstition that a spirit-life haunts their white dead spaces.

A ruffle of wind blew a window in the clouds overhead, a

luculent oval in darkness, ravelled into smoke-silver round its edges by the hidden moon behind. And through the oval I was looking suddenly at the dream-white peak of the Weiss-horn, impossibly remote, unearthly in its concealed illumination, unreal in its frosted loveliness. Lulled by the choir of little hopes and doubts which squabble prettily for our attention on the eve of any adventure, I followed drowsily the puffs of tobacco-smoke from my pipe, as they seemed to creep up the glistening peak by rock rib and snowy hollow. And now I was ascending with them, vaulting over ice cliffs, drifting upon rock needles, and soaring . . . soaring. . . .

A shout from Cortez brought me back in vexation from a sublime solitary ascent. In his case, it transpired, the Balm had murdered sleep. Lighting the lantern, I found it was after midnight. I passed on the cock-crow, and started the short crescendo argument which preludes as a matter of form the moment at which any member of a climbing-party will agree to leave his sack on a dark and unpropitious morning. No one of us is ever convinced by the reasoning. But we all emerge, involuntarily, at some moment or other, in a pure reflex of temper. A wise man will be content on such mornings with one step at a time. We pledged ourselves to undertake no more than a 'reconnaissance' up the glacier; arranged a signal-code with the comic porter, who was to wait at the camp only if we needed to return to it for a second night, got the fire burning at last and gulped hot maggi and tea, shivering and still half-draped in our sacks for the illusion of warmth.

Soon after one we achieved a start, in an unwholesome-looking obscurity that should have been moonshine. For centuries of hours we lifted leaden feet up saturated grass and crumbling shale, through a warm and silken atmosphere of evil omen. A snapping cold which frizzes his hair round the edges of his woollen helmet is the oracle a mountaineer asks of the dark hours.

Sound tradition dictates that there shall be no talking before sunrise. How many victorious ascents would have died before dawn in ignominious retreat if the distaste, the sensation of cobwebs in the mouth, which keeps each individual silently anathematizing his own folly in leaving soft dreams for the horrors of a midnight moraine, had gathered to itself the sevenfold strength of an expressed collective feeling! Consequently Josef's plaintive murmur that the dew on the grass was due to rain, and even the roar of a most untimely avalanche down the

glacier beside us, could be treated as breaches of decorum, and left unanswered.

The basin of the Bies glacier above the falls of ice, from which the north face rises abruptly, was our immediate objective. To reach this we might either scale the stairway of precipice above us which bordered the glacier, or turn into the fall itself and force a way up its galleries and terraces of looming ice. The precipice we knew to be difficult, and in the dark, with newly fallen snow to complicate it, it seemed unalluring. On the other hand Cortez assured us, from the experience gained upon his two previous failures, that an hour's work would unravel the mazes of the icefall.

Impassively, as becomes men consciously foredoomed to failure, we swung across the base of the cliffs, and stumbled over an interminable steepness of moraine to a point where a sloping ice terrace ran out across the shatter of the fall. An unpleasing surprise blocked our end of the terrace, where a litter of ice-blocks, some as large as sentry-boxes, gave warning of avalanches. The satin shimmer on their surfaces suggested that theirs was a very recent fall, possibly that which had uplifted its voice soon after our start. The danger zone, however, appeared to be confined to the glacier edge, where rock met ice. The smoother curves of the central icefall beyond, full half a mile in width, by every law should be exempt in the morning hours.

Resolving not to return by the same route, we clambered hastily (still arguing the point) across the débris, and halted on the farther terrace for breath and for time to fix our pronged ice-claws. In the quarter-light the glacier wall above us looked formidable, a mounting hill of glass curved like the dome of a mosque. We clung up it insect-wise, using each little crack and chipping an occasional step with our axes. After some sixty feet the angle eased off, and we set our feet more confidently, balancing up the sharp ice slats that divided the tumbling shadows of crevasses. We had soon to put on the rope—a hundred feet between the three of us—for the vague light was deceptive, and a veil of new snow covered the lesser rifts and interfered with our estimate of the security of flying bridges.

Between the actual falls, each a sheer icewall from forty to eighty feet high, and in part overhanging, the glacier was broken into rapids—ice in incalculable eddies, ice-jettison hummocked together in frigid confusion and mantled with snow, ice-arches frailly bridging unknown depth. Through, about and over these we had to move with speedy caution. Ordinarily

upon such a glacier a night frost should prepare a safe morning passage; but the clouded night hours had weakened its clutch, and Josef mourned with reason—"the föhn is in the glacier!" Breaths of that fatal wind souged now and again in our faces from the crevasses; and the musical clink of icicles falling into the hollows under our feet, with occasionally the wet muffled echo of snow slipping from some ledge into further depth, betrayed its treacherous activity.

The first grey-blue wall, darkening against dusk above us, we accepted uncomplainingly. Josef jammed himself into a vertical crack up its face, and laboriously cut steps upward for each straddling foot. Forty feet up the crack widened, and we had to set our shoulders against one wall and walk with our pronged feet up the other, until we could reach up an arm and axe, and pull out on to the sloping roof of snow.

Beyond the next and somewhat easier ice rapid, the second wall appeared as a shadowy object of resentment; for these manœuvres were devouring precious hours. We could see no way of turning it; so Josef and Cortez steadied one another up a ladder of nicks slowly cut in the wall, and blurred into indistinctness above me. I heard, successively, a mutter of furious debate—mountain half-lights discourage loud talk!—as to whether the next portion was overhanging or only vertical, the shuffle of a body propelled upward on an ice-axe from below, the grunts of defeat, and the louder scraping of a risky return on to supporting shoulders.

I reflected that these discouragements would probably lead to a futile discussion as to the wisdom of our proceeding at all. So I lengthened my rope with a spare coil, and without waiting for the abusive shadows to descend, I crept away along the pouting upper lip of the crevasse which gaped widely below the wall. Within a short distance I chanced upon a concealed slanting groove. It was lined with hard snow, and seemed to run right up the face. I kicked quickly up it, chipping finger-holds, and was already some way towards the sky-line when the completion of their anxious re-descent of the wall released the outburst of despair which I had been expecting to hear from Josef. Happily my accomplice groove dodged in behind a boss in the top overhang, nudged me out on to the coping, and I was able to anticipate the defeatist moral of the discourse by an inviting jerk upon his rope from above.

The remaining walls, each in unwelcome turn, we treated with indignant caution. But the gradual thickening of light

made them less daunting in their indefinite form and height, and guided us to more deliberate lines of assault.

Four hours after leaving camp we gathered on the snowy rim of the glacier basin above the long fall.¹ From our feet fell the wintry Niagara up which we had toiled, and so steeply that its nearest white rapid alone was visible, running out upon darkness over the unseen gorge. Round us, in three parts of a grey circle, the great summits glowered between driving clouds, hunching their shoulders against the tawny and liquid lighting of a windy sunrise.

The wind proved a good ally. It was demonstrable that a north wind could not mean really bad weather. And the four eyes of faith owned by Cortez and myself detected a transparency in the cloud-curtain which foretold its early dispersal by the sun. Anyway, before turning back, we ought at least to cross the Bies glacier and choose a way for 'the morrow's attack,' over the bergshrund and on to the foot-walls of the mountain. So we stood, with helmets and moustaches starched with ice and our faces greyed with the sallowness of men who have been working long in the dark, and ate green-oily sardines from our frozen and hairy mittens. The morning was very cold, and sardines go down with very little trouble. Then we shortened the rope, and crossed the rolling snow-glacier at a double.

Ten minutes upon its wind-hardened crust, and we were under the north face. The trenchant serrated ridges, bright with ice, reached out at us, and soon swept round us with rather a gaunt embrace. We held off for a moment, and looked upward at what they and the day might hold for us. A hauberk of rock, riveted with ice and damascened with fresh snow, vanished some two thousand feet higher under a gorget of ice-cliff. And this, contracting and steepening and strengthened at intervals by transverse hoops of blue hanging glacier, merged far above in a plumed helmet of snow, the summit of the perfect mountain. For our attempt we had already chosen a rock ridge on the border of the breastplate; because its erect edge ought to secure us against the danger of ice or rock avalanches falling from the higher slopes as the sun gained power.

Josef did not wait for the suggestion which I was meditating that it might be well before we turned back for the day to make

¹ In making the second ascent of the north face, Miss Sanders (Mrs. O'Malley), improved greatly upon our line, crossing from the Weisshorn hut over the east ridge, and direct to the Bies glacier, probably by the route referred to on p. 88.



Schallihorn

WEISSHORN
Northern Face

Bruneggghorn

certain that the ridge would 'go on the morrow.' He dashed up the snow dunes below the cliffs, and on and up over the open schrund, clinging like a cat up a skeleton drawbridge of indurated ice. The rocks above it were grippable and gladsome, smiling with dimples and beauty-spots for our fingers and toes. A velvety bloom of fresh snowfall on the ledges, and of ice in the cupid-crinkles, admonished us not to take off our ice-claws. Our thick gloves, freezing by pressure to the glazed rock, gave an extra firmness of hand-grip, for which we were grateful—except when the gloves preferred to leave us rather than the rocks. We climbed very fast, to overtake those lost morning hours, and we had climbed long enough together to move 'as one man.'

May it be repeated again? Climbing is not merely getting up rocks with hands and feet. A good climber must certainly be able to do that. But he must hold at the same time a slippery axe. Also a coil of rope, which he lets in or out as the man ahead may require, irrespective of his own motions at the moment. He must keep perpetually moving at equidistance from the men moving above and below him, watch that neither rope catches, use a changing variety of hand- and foot-holds to the best advantage, and observe, simultaneously, where the man ahead sets hand or foot, so as to lose no time in a fresh search for his own. He must be safe for himself in every movement and at every pause, but also safe for that extra margin which he will need if some one else slips or needs help. These are primary qualifications. For high mountaineering of moderate difficulty, he will need some dozen others; including an eye for country, for angle and for weather, a right economy of effort, and an exact knowledge of himself. For really severe rocks, where only one man moves at a time, a new code has to be mastered; and yet another for ice, and another for snow. The joy of the mountains is a matter of atmosphere and of individual temperament: we are not all born with the kind of imagination that can convert it to our health and pleasure. But the joy of climbing is easier for us all to understand. It is the joy of physical self-expression, the joy of the long innings, the hard rally or the close finish, united to that finer pleasure, the cumulative joy of good combined play.

Our fluent progress up the ridge was checked at the end of the second hour by a call for a breakfast-halt from Cortez, who was not called so because he was often silent upon a peak. I had seen him ballast his sack with any number of chocolate

boxes, and a cedar-chest of cigars. It was only judicious to redistribute such a burden from time to time. But the ridge was no place for a session. So we stood within arm's-length, hitched the rope over roughnesses, and by leaning head or shoulder pensively against the rock managed to free our hands for the business of rolls and potted-meat tins. A well-aimed sunbeam crept down the ridge, to thaw our fingers and boots. We were the more ready to straighten our shoulders, look boldly out over the submission of darkness, and live up to the majesty of our temporary kingship. For it was a regal if heady position, set far up against a splendour of white precipice, receiving complacently across our buttered crusts the homage of the rising sun, of the once rebellious glacier now level far below our feet, and of the ranks of snow peaks and lesser ranges in order distributed to the horizon beyond.

We do not often enough feel proud of being alive. Things are so arranged as to convince us, during too much of our time, of their pettiness and of our own meanness. Our moral fibre suffers by our compulsory humility. As a tonic I know of nothing equal to a wide view from an unaccommodating ledge half way up a great mountain. It is more than a tonic, it is a vital elixir to discover how far the sense of our personal insignificance can be reconciled with a royal pride in the dignity of earth and in the successful imposition of our own will upon it.

Ten minutes later we were clattering up the ridge again. The testy hiss of a snow avalanche down the ice on our left had signalled hurry. The sunbeams were racing up ahead of us, playing pranks with our snow- and ice-corners to come. The ridge greeted our return to work with its one difficult section. An upright scoff of sulphur-tinted rock jeered at our frontal attack. We had in the end to scale one of its undercut side-walls, swarm over a projecting ice-gutter, and scratch steps up the hard snow-tiles of the roof gable. Soon after this, Josef suddenly took fire. Climbing with a man of moods by new ways on misty-moisty mornings is like striking a damp safety-match. Pressed too hard or too quick, he loses his head, and may sputter out. He has to be urged lightly and tentatively, until—somehow—somewhere—he kindles into flame. For no reason except that the sun was now warming his spine, Josef at this point dashed ahead, struck an attitude, and exclaimed—"Who follows me this day will reach the summit!" It was indeed some time since we had remembered to remember that we were only 'reconnoitring.'

About nine o'clock the rock rib ended, squibbing off in a shower of pinnacles. Above them an exquisite volute of snow curled upwards for a hundred feet, and gave out upon a bulging brow of ice. On a large scale it was not unlike the junction of the trunk and forehead of a white elephant. We trod crab-steps up the fragile and nervous trunk, chopped out comfortable buckets in the broadening profile at the join, and waited there for the long minutes while Josef was cutting foot- and hand-holds up the all but overhanging ice-brow above. With a fine eye to effect our elephant's head was projected, broodingly, from a salient angle between two facets of the north face. The facet upon our right was built up in cross-planes of glacier, overlapping terraces, twisting white corridors torn across by crevasses, and ruined cloisters under arcades of darker blue ice. Away across the bare ice slopes on our left, descending in a single ruthless arc, swept by avalanches and scored with their tracks, we could see the eastern ridge of ordinary ascent. Even while we watched two black dots appeared moving upon a snow col; and we knew them for Mayor and his guide. Robin Mayor's happy mountaineering habit was to make every party, plan, pace, length of expedition and degree of difficulty seem to his friends exactly the one which suited him best. He had left us in the valley the day before to follow this unselfish line, lest another on the rope might prejudice our chances.

Josef, we soon found, had saved his energy, and flattered ours, by spacing his ice steps imperially. However, he was now firmly anchored in an ice stoop hollowed out above the brow; and with the rope for moral balance we could face the daunting venture up the corner, toe-springing from one ice-nick to the next at about waist level. The forehead retreated; our salient angle began to flatten out; and patches of frozen snow relieved the step-making, each step requiring only six or eight strokes in place of thirty or forty.

A few hundred feet higher, the broad headland of snow up which we were now climbing was traversed by an underhung hoop of ice. We cut steps up a sharply inclined gallery on our right, that looked like turning the end of the cliff. It brought us, instead, to the mouth of a funnel, a breach in the ice-hoop; and the funnel was floored with fresh snow, dry and frothy, and tilted at a very high angle. At every step upon this snow we sank to the waist: it might have been sea-foam for all the support of its aerated surface. Unspeakably fatiguing, it yet relieved us of one considerable anxiety. For it was not snow

of the kind that splits across and slips off in avalanches ; and since the preceding cloudy night the probability of avalanches had hung darkling over our heads. But now, if we proceeded with due caution, it appeared as if we might be spared, upon this upper and more doubtful section of our new climb, the principal hazard of great snow faces.

But to drive a path up such steep and fathomless foam-snow meant desperate work for the leader. Each lifted leg in turn sank in, until shoulder and head were against and even under the snow. After a hundred feet I called a halt, and we changed the lead. Up the rest of this funnel—and up others that followed it, between higher ice-cliffs—the only way to ascend at all was to crawl on all-fours, hammering out a harder groove with forearms and shins. By flatly thrashing the snow into a trough one to two feet in depth, we obtained a surface up which we could creep, very gingerly, on elbows and knees, using the pick of the axe in one hand as a grappling-hook. When we looked back upon these precipitous grooves from above, it appeared as if some antediluvian reptile or giant sloth had been writhing up the snow walls at our heels, one of the lost dragons of alpine legend.

After an hour or so of this flogging I was not sorry when a shout from Cortez hailed me from below to notice a beautiful phenomenon of cloud-building over the Zermatt valley. I sat backward into the snow-surf with relief, and watched it thankfully. Forming in the green hollow of the gorge eight thousand feet below, and gradually mounting with a sort of huge but invisible haste, a column of grey cloud, shot through here and there by sidelights from the sun, towered up to our level, and past us. A single pillar and unbuttressed, like Watts's 'Cloud' but more symmetrically rounded, some half a mile in diameter at its base and the same at its summit, it poised upright fully fifteen thousand feet above the valley. For the time it balanced erect and motionless. But the winds over the ranges loosened it to its downfall. Slowly it bent over, and fell from us, wreathing in a long bending mist round the bases of the mountain.

The ice-cliffs diminished into local out-crops : the snow relented of its cunning. And as it hardened and steepened we could press more rapidly and straightly for the sunlit spire, now no longer hopelessly remote. Chipping light steps up the ever-steepening wall we saw the assurance of success wavering down the white slopes towards us ; but with it came, also, a new measure of that awe of the loneliness and height of these great

peaks which no familiarity or confidence can dispel. The eastern and northern ridges, the two rims of the white shield up which we were forcing our way, drew together above us, hemming us in closer and closer. Until, up the centre of the last silvery fling into space, the supporting disk grew so narrow, the breadths of blue sky encroaching upon either hand so imminent and immense, that I began to feel something of the discomfort which assails tree-climbers, whose eyes, gazing out on either side of their swaying tree-top on to a moving circle of sky, deny any real sense of stability to the grip of their hands or feet. A wrack of cloud raced over and round us; and as I looked up at the tenuous white vane above I seemed to see it bending narrowly like a twig, threatening to flick us off our airy footing on its recoil.

A last little firmness of brown and ice-glazed rock, arranged like a love-lock down the temple of the peak and convenient as were the curls of Rapunzel to her baffled lover, helped us in a triumphant spurt out on to the final crest. In a few seconds we stood upon the icy pinnacle itself, the noblest of mountain summits, frosted with ice plumes, and thrust up by its three colossal ridges into a perpetual wind.

It was past mid-day. We had been seven hours on the face, and twelve from the bivouac, with hardly a halt. On the heights the air and our own concentration make fatigue an impossibility, so long as anything remains to be overcome. The reaction on the summit is commensurate. Happiness is only to be measured by contrasts; and even as climbing is the hardest nice work in the world, so there is probably no leisure so nicely satisfying as the relaxation that follows it. Every thought, of past effort, of effort to come, even of fatigue, is swamped under a tide of physical well-being. All our senses are at rest; but they have been finely attuned by our long effort, and remain in their repose peculiarly sensitive to external impression. This is yet one more reason why we seem to find the view from a mountain-summit beautiful above all other views. But we are human and alive; and the interval of realization has to be filled by some form of action or of deliberate inaction. Some mortals go to sleep comfortably on a summit, for all the cold: this is wasteful of great moments. Some prefer to eat; which is sensible but prosaic. And some just gaze and forget to think, letting all the luxury of rest and sight and feeling pour in uncatalogued—only afterwards to be remembered as a luminous cloud of one lost hour's delightful existence.

Cortez went solidly to sleep. He had found our last hours of exertion, and the cedar-boxes, exhausting. Josef and I clambered down into an angle of rock, and pretended to eat, and made half-remarks in occasional undertone about our past climbs on the peak. But it was surface speech ; and it did not trouble the deeper current of lazy, passive contentment. Resolve, doubt, fear, hope, tense effort and intense delight, all the feelings of a life-time, we have lived them through in half a mountain day to the tune of our utmost bodily activity. And they have all culminated in one instant of victory. Who would ask better than to prolong to their last second the receptive moments of the reaction : not to have to disturb, even by a breath of thought upon the mirror, the bright and tranquil rainbow-reflection of our past storms of feeling ?

But the weather decided that we had been indulged enough. A pucker of cold mist shut us off from the world, and a sting of frozen snow drove in behind the mist, whipping us on to our feet. We began the descent by the familiar eastern ridge. Its narrow snow-crest, descending precariously between two rising swirls of cloud, had been booted into ice-cups by previous parties. The cups were filled with pebbles of hail which crunched merrily under our prongs. Dry snow worried all of our faces that the helmets left exposed. Balancing down the sharp edge, in and out of the wind around the towers, and always descending—until the back-muscles ached with the jar as each foot came down—we reached the neck of rock which marked the point where we might turn down southward over the broken face. Here at last we could take off our ice-claws, solve the rope-knots frozen during fifteen hours to the hardness of wire, and be free at last each to pursue his own foible of descent.

The only risk which remained was that of loosening stones on the littered cliffs. So we poltered down on parallel lines ; and reassembled above the steep snow curtain that trails down on to the level glacier. The snow was genially disposed. In a riotous glissade we hummed down the next thousand feet, swerving left or right from supposititious crevasses after the fashion of ski-runners. Much where I had turned a sitting somersault in an earlier year Cortez tripped upon a casual stone. And as I sang through the air downward, and past his travelling welter of white spume speckled with sack and axe and darker tossing limbs, I mused upon the limited number of expressive attitudes which our bodies are constructed to assume : for an unlike cause was here reproducing an all but identical effect.

We roped up again to cross the remaining glacier ; and kept a heedful eye upon its hidden trickery of afternoon crevasses.

The hut at last, with a brew of tea to clear incipient headaches ; the grumble of two climbers burrowing for warmth in the straw ; the lumbar jolting of the long track descent ; and, as always in conclusion, the waves of denser air meeting us from the valley, heavy with routine, reserve and the other civilized vapours :—vapours which are strangers, happily, to the hills, and dissipated as soon as new action begins again above five thousand feet.

All that survives of such a climb is seldom more than this sediment of small incident. From the constant companionship of the scenery and from the continuity of the action the human incidents stood out a little at the time ; and they endure as the clearer impressions because they were incongruous. In our less exalted valley humour we find them as lees in our glass of memory, and stir them diluted into a tale. But our vivid and day-long consciousness of the mountain, of each other, and of the drama which we and the mountain played out at length together, cannot be faithfully reproduced. It has even escaped all but our own general recollection. The mountaineer returns to his hills because he remembers always that he has forgotten so much. Of one thing alone he is certain, that he will pass one more such irreproducible day somewhere among the mountain sources of unspoiled pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII

DAYS WITH A GUIDE

He is here, he is here,
with a rushing of wings on the winds of rapturous flight ;
comrade, and king, and boy,
Morning is with us, Morning is with us, and Light !

OUR eagerness to get the best out of our mountain holidays does not grow less as the time allowed for them by a profession grows shorter. The arrival of friends is usually as uncertain as the weather ; their condition is likely to be as unreliable at the start as our own. It was reassuring for me to be able to count upon finding my good comrade in the craft, Josef Knubel, waiting round the home-coming bend of the Rhone valley, trained and punctual to be off and doing.

In a fair season Robin Mayor and I had traversed the Charmoz and the Grépon during a short day. We had had with us Rafael Lochmatter, a Lochmatter in grain, hewn in the rough and left unpolished. We must have drained that day's draught of pleasant doings very thoroughly at the time ; for only two incidents are left undissolved at the bottom of the glass. E. A. Broome was before us when we reached the Grépon, a big-hearted mountaineer whose infectious enthusiasm even in age used to meet us on the glaciers, or off them, like a " jocund day . . . tiptoe on the misty mountain-tops." In front of him again was a party of Italian amateurs ; and their leader stuck for an hour half-way up the Mummery Crack, effectually blocking it, refusing to descend, and only kicking spasmodically at long intervals. With a mixture of a little alarm and much amusement and relief I then saw Broome's guide, Alois Pollinger, and our Rafael jerk the recusant down out of the crack by his rope, and field him deftly on the sloping traverse below. The second incident was almost more moving. Mayor's pre-Adamite mustard-coloured jacket, my foreground upon so many climbs, took the occasion of a higher Grépon chimney to resolve itself, unrent,

unshriven, into its elements, filming out upon the air like the 'one-horse shay' in a single puff of venerable saffron dust.

But the climb left also a suggestion behind it. Why should not the doctrine of 'ridging' summits—as a means of preserving their romance—apply equally well to the Chamonix Aiguilles, linked in lengths of adventure upon their great granite walls? The following season favoured the idea. The conditions were unimpeachable. We might well hope to traverse the Charmoz, the Grépon and the Blaitière in association. It was a plan which should fill more hours of sunlight with an unusual variety of sunny climbing.

We left the Montenvers, Josef and I, at the customary dark hour; and, as I hope also may be customary, we relieved the dark melancholy of the upward-winding path to the Plan des Aiguilles by watching that shining portent, the twinkling cross of the Chamonix lights, awake upon the sleep of the valley far below. The Nantillons glacier, most mutable of mountain avenues, was slumberous under ghostly shadows, but crisply kind to our feet. At its upper end, the rugged head of the Charmoz rested a square rock chin sullenly upon the ice in the shadows of even colder sleep.

We started up its cloven and obstinate blackness, leading alternately as the convenience of the rope suggested. For my own part I had learned to steal the lead whenever I could, chiefly in order to avoid carrying the food-sack as well as the camera. For once I managed to wriggle, back and foot, up the notorious ice chimney without having to call for the traditional shoulder and axe-push from behind. Vauntingly I commented—to Josef's invisible but audible struggles in pursuit—upon the rarity with which guides use this convenient method of climbing chimneys. Josef's sufficient retort was to unsling the impeding sack from his shoulders, and to send it up to me—this time once and for all.

On the Charmoz ridge we met the sunrise, a golden flood of promise which, for once, shall escape description. The first great pinnacle, a familiar illustration in climbing literature, where guide-folk sway upon the heads of ice-axes above abysms, proved something of an obstacle for a party of two. We were experimenting that day with a thin rope, used double. The intention being to let it out, as a long single rope, wherever we had to 'abseil'; and so save ourselves the extra weight of a reserve rope. We never practised the economy again. Throughout the day the diverging spirals of the doubled rope embraced all the aiguilles upon which we had no intentions. Below this

pinnacle, for instance, sixty lively vicious feet of cord slid into a crevice of the slab upon which we stood. There they jammed, and for ten minutes squeaked and cracked in mockery, while we wrought for their recovery, exchanging low-voiced and biting comments upon the theory of rope-management. Then it fell to me to balance breezily upon one foot on a ledge subtending the pinnacle, while Knubel pirouetted for another twenty minutes from my shoulder to my head and back again, in his fretful attempts to lasso the head of the pinnacle far above him. His reach is short, and his aim on this occasion proved inferior. Plaintively he blamed my unstable poise; and kicked off my hat, to wind his nailed boots the more firmly in my hair. The hat's substitute, a swathel of brown silk scarf built into a turban, lent a touch of oriental magnificence to the rest of the signorial day.

The forfeit deposited—the pinnacle yielded. Beyond it the sheer, sharp-cut and crumpled horns along the narrow rock crest tossed us up and down through the fresh morning air with exhilarating vigour. Bent upon crossing all their storm-filed points, we hazarded several giddy and some probably novel swings and roundabouts, before we were flung up, from the wrong side, on to the summit rock. I recollect in particular a hand-hanging roundabout along the Mer de Glace face, with a swing-up over an overhang on to the extreme end of the Charmoz wall, where it commands the gap under the Grépon. It was a stirring passage; which drew from Josef the whole chromatic scale of his little excited shrills—"Hjesas!—Hjesas!!—Hjesas!!!"

From a sun-bask on the top we saw that once again other parties were before us at the Crack, on the face of the rival precipice over the way. So we lay for a while across the coping, our toes out over the Mer de Glace and our faces peering down at the Nantillons glacier. Two guideless parties of students visible upon the glacier challenged our idle speculation. They had evidently spent the previous night out on the Grépon, and were now descending the icefall very promiscuously. Equally evident was their tropical costume, of only sunburn above and running-shorts and boots below. It seemed an odd outfit for so chilly a sacrifice to the night spirit of romance.

We clambered and roped-off down into the gap. The great couloir which leads up to the foot of the Grépon crack was still cold in shadow and disagreeably loose. It is a way it has. On another occasion three of us spent two hours in clearing deathly

snow off its smooth nubbles ; and the agonies which our hands suffered in the process are a gloomy revenant that shall haunt its unease. We broke through the sunny window at its top, and out on to the Mer de Glace face again, with a cheer for the return of heat. Two parties of spirited ladies were besieging the crack, under the guidance of some average Chamonix incapables. So, for a tranquil hour and more we scrambled about over the vast red steepness of the Mer de Glace wall, identifying Ryan's route up the face, and designing another of our own—which had to wait many years for its fulfilment.

When our turn at the crack came, I elected to follow Josef on a strictly slack rope. I wished to make certain that I could lead it with an unruffled spirit. The difficulties are not excessive—I have faced them since without grovelling. But there are some ten feet on a convex section cut off from all but the empyrean, where a leader must remember to forget that he has nerves. In the 'cannon's mouth' above, we passed the ladies with all mutual good wishes. The oblique chimney which leads back to the main ridge had grown easier since our last visit. The throughway behind, out of the seductive prison under its capstone, may have been choked for us before by frozen débris, or the opening may really have been discovered and cleared out in the interval. On the straddle-knee swarm up the split crag overhanging the Nantillons face—the crag which is now called the 'râteau de chèvre,' and which remains presumably, after further years of knee-polishing, still the most technically difficult part of the ascent—Josef jammed his foot in the vice of the cleft, and had to be hoisted out of his boot by an improvised rope-pulley. I photographed with glee his sour-sweet smile, as he recovered and relaced the truant.

Upon the long abseiling down the Devil's monolith our doubled rope justified itself at last ; and the stretching it there received from our weight disciplined its spirals for the rest of the day. The rust-brown ramparts of rock were in marvellous touch. The sun-scorch was tempered by a veil of glacier air ; and our duet as we swept along, over and through the megalithic fortifications, sang the song of two nations simultaneously from the two ends of the performing rope.

The mid-day sun blazed full upon the columnar summit ; and long and luxuriously we basked there, on rock that seemed to glow red with the heat. The circular panorama from this phanar might be criticized as too complete. We found it easier to absorb the view by stages, in the shreds and glimpses that

crept under our eyelids as they closed and unclosed in siesta. My own sofa was the outer end of the balanced block which projects into sunlight over free air; and after a time I felt it sounding under me like a tuning-fork, as Josef began to bellow advice to the Chamoniards, who were visibly in difficulties on the face of the Devil's monolith far behind us along the ridge. As foolish guide-books used to recommend, they had hitched their long rope for the descent round the detached stone on its cranium; a method which at best can only establish a wireless connection with the Mer de Glace. Grey torpid moths, creeping upon the brown spire, they looked so near in sun-dancing space, but were in fact so distant in time, that a number of them were overtaken by night, still on the peak.

While Josef screamed and ruffled at them like an angry eaglet, I cleared off all the tins and bottles within reach of a sluggard's arm. I had an unthinking prejudice against these leavings until A. D. Godley, in a witty and philosophical paper which has since deservedly become a mountain classic, championed the privileges of the picnicker, and convinced the over-logical among us that cleanliness is only next to godliness. A mountain top is, after all, a 'philosopher's stone,' and may be trusted to do its own alchemy.

We could see Donald Robertson and Robin Mayor busily engaged upon the Aiguilles de Blaitière opposite. And our sloth took comfort from the thought of the steps on the ice-slope which they would be leaving for us. Reluctantly, at lazy last, we collected our happy, scattered limbs, and bundled them into the rope, and the descent.

The cliffs of the Nantillons face were blistering and gritty, with a stifle of sun and no comfort of moving air. They offered nothing that could tempt us to dalliance. We perspired, propped and slithered down them; and only breathed again where they shot us out on to the cooler snows of the col des Nantillons, in about an hour from the top.

For all our indolence of rests it was still early in the day; and the black, satiny spires of the Blaitière dared us invitingly across the pass. Their ridge-way chilly with snow-ribbon and ice-glaze would be the right change for finger-tips tender with the rough heat of the rocks of morning. We piled sack, camera and our jackets upon the curl of the pass, retaining only enough clothes for decency and one axe for emergency. To reduce our dead-weight in the middle of a prolonged effort is like changing a 5-oz. for a 4-oz. foil in fencing practice. It gives our muscles an

extraordinary sense of ease and lightness. A man, also, in training probably goes at his best at the end of eight or ten hours of hard climbing. "Now," said Knubel, "we shall see! Two Aiguilles are all right: but a third—or even a fourth—for an already ageing Herr—?" I shall not forget his pose as he said it: the trim, tense, dark little figure stripped like a hound for the trail, erect under the white curve of the pass, with one foot planted lightly against the snow-crest at the level of his waist—ready to spring into the ascent.

The animal in us will out. The Blaitière diadem is a miracle of workmanship, of ebony and crystal upon frosted silver. But we handled it, danced over it, for the mere pleasure of our own movement. Also, we did not want to keep Mayor and Robertson waiting. We passed them in our stride as they were descending, just below the break in the keen ridge where a rope is generally left to help the return. Using their charitable steps on the ice-slope that led up to the central and northern peaks, we found our way—it was our first visit—up to the central summit.

Here we subsided, suddenly and completely. All idea of ever moving again left us. The surrounding stillness was overwhelming. It was as though the world, and not we, had stopped spinning and was enjoying the respite with an enormous and dumb surprise. Five minutes passed; and we both rolled over, and meditated upon new ascents of the fantastic spikes between us and the far Aiguille du Plan. Five minutes more; and under an impulse as sudden and simultaneous we got up, dropped into a snowy kink in the arrested world, and trotted up the northern summit.

Again we subsided, and immobility and silence engulfed us. But not for so long. A vague impulse began to take shape in the air about us, to climb also the south-west peak. We had to sit up, and disperse it unformulated. Our respectable intention had, throughout, been to travel the continuous coronet of summits round the head of the Nantillons glacier. The worthy Aiguilles that stood back off that line might not, in deference to their dignity and our own consistency, be swept in as after-thoughts.

Once more the spirit of movement came upon us both together. We stood up, and stooped for the return plunge to the pass. Happy the mountaineer who has dreamed through such a descent, if only once in a waking life-time. I have never slid down a sunbeam. But the flight down that glistening ridge, cushioned upon springs of sunny air rather than upon our own extremities,

cannot have been very unlike it. Mountain climbing is the supreme occasion of physical enjoyment. Even so, the days when the condition of the mountain, the condition of the weather and the condition of every member of the party are all perfect and working perfectly in accord can come but rarely. But when they do come, for their duration the delight of rhythmic movement dominates all our consciousness. It is not the ecstasy of the spinning Dervish, which is a stupor achieved by mechanical repetitions. It is a changing delight, based upon motion infinitely varying. Far from doping, it actually stimulates our senses and our intelligence. So that we see, feel, hear and appreciate through our trance with an almost unnatural intensity, and at the same time continue in alert control of our own spell-weaving. Memory would like to assert that we floated down from the Blaitière. But Mayor, watching from the pass below, might contradict me as to the fact. "Ach, Herr,"—Josef remarked with mournful relish, as we ended with a fleeting glissade out on to the snow of the pass—"wir mache' noch manches zusamme':—aber so fliege' wir nie wieder!"

The whole party rambled back to the Montenvers for tea. It was the kind of summer day when it is easier to go on than to stop. And it may now be admitted that we resisted with some difficulty the vulgar temptation to collect the peaks of the Petits Charmoz, and the Aiguille de l'M by the way. Time was not calculated in the circles of the Inferno; and times should not be given for a semi-circle through Elysium. But, lest we may be blamed for 'hurrying off the great peaks,' I may recall that of the fifteen to sixteen hours which we borrowed that day, more than four were paid back to the sunlight and to the view in breaks of orthodox contemplative rest.

Josef's foreboding had to be disproved. Also, the crescent of the Aiguilles, from the Charmoz to the Blaitière, had its serpentine corollary in the curl of the ridge from the Dent du Requin to the Aiguille du Midi. These opposing crescents, each a triad of starry peaks, are roughly joined back to back by a botched ridge connecting the Blaitière and the Plan. But this link we proposed to neglect. Its rock masonry, not unlike many architectural after-patchings, is of inferior quality.

On the anniversary of the Nantillons circuit I set out for the second crescent. I intended to ascend first the Dent du Requin, follow the unclimbed ridge—or, if this proved impracticable, the glacier below it—northward to the Aiguille du Plan: and thence,



Midi

Requin

Plan

Blaitière
Col des Nantillons
(Coulair)

Grépon

Charmoz

CHAMONIX AIGUILLES

turning sharply south-west along the crest of the superior col du Plan, make the first traverse over the nameless truncated aiguille down to the inferior col du Plan. Beyond this we should follow the lovely skyline of snow up to the Aiguille du Midi. As we look up from Chamonix at this league-long snow wall, it resembles a silver-dipped valance, pinned upon the blue sky by its terminal aiguilles as a screen for the valley against the higher desolation of ice-world and storm-wind behind it.

There were many attractive 'ifs' and much promise of adventure in the journey. The ridge between the Requin and the Plan had not been explored; the history of the abortive aiguille left much to the imagination; and the white skyline above Chamonix, although it had been crossed, had never been followed throughout its length.

By chance Josef was busy that day with Donald Robertson, on the Grépon round the corner; and I had for substitute a guide in petto, with a reputation only exceeded by his caution. For his short appearance upon the scene he may figure as 'Thomas.'

In weather so irreproachable that it passed unnoticed, we turned the base of the Requin by the Mer de Glace, and mounted the icefalls of the glacier des Pèlerins. As I wished to make sure whether our link, the further ridge from the Requin to the Plan, would go, before we committed ourselves to an ascent of the Requin, we passed on up the glacier under the walls of the Requin, and climbed a short pugnacious buttress direct to a notch in that further ridge, just under the Requin summit. After a few hundred feet of difficult see-saw climbing, up and down over its flame-like plates, we were arrested by an apparently complete 'cut-off.' Thomas doubted. I had still respect for the infallibility of youth. The ridge had not been climbed, and might indeed be unclimbable. With a patient sigh I abandoned at a stroke one-third of our hoped-for crescent. We descended to the glacier again; and, on a humble parallel line below our abandoned ridge, we stamped and chipped up the slopes and gentle icefalls of the glacier to the superior col du Plan at its head; and so, by the usual route, arrived on the top of the Aiguille du Plan.

The halt of tradition which we made here proved a further misfortune. I could feel the vast printed letters of a 'BUT' inscribing themselves upon the blue sky in a halo about Thomas's hat. Thomas had time to take in, and to mix with his imagination, the remaining two-thirds of our crescent now unfolded below

his eyes: the sharp ice crest of the col leading across to the decapitated aiguille: the unsociable hunch of rock shoulder with which that aiguille greeted the col's icy touch; and beyond, the thin whip-lash of snow ridge uncoiling up the sky, until it flicked glitteringly into the startled face of the distant and higher Aiguille du Midi. Thomas more than doubted. With dramatic gesture he refused even to look at the "weeks of step-cutting along the col," which were to end only against the shrug of "that impossible wall!"

We may not over-persuade a companion, once the truth of him is out. I looked down at the pastoral peace of the Chamonix valley on the one hand, at the surge and fall and meet of countless sunny peaks and boisterous glaciers upon the other, at the white and leaning cathedral dome of Mont Blanc far up in the sky in front, and at the emulous uprush of the dark unclimbed ridges about our feet. Downward to right and left, making as it were two supporting arms of the throne upon which we sat, curved the two ridges of promise to the Midi and to the Requin, bright segments of the crescent which we were not even to attempt. I have seldom realized so keenly the gratitude which we owe to sights of beauty and of power, such as our mountains, and the obligation under which they put us to express our feeling in some fitting way.

As to what that way shall be, we must each decide according to our climbing capacity—and be patient of each other's fancies. For myself, I felt—and never more than on that summit—that every climber owed it to the mountains, to his feeling for them, and to himself, to choose always the way of mountain service that should best approve his craft, his goodwill and his power of appreciation, and that should give to every mountain the opportunity of impressing its individual character most fully upon him. It seemed like effrontery to have offered so much, to have then walked domestically up the Plan, and now to be sitting and looking at all we proposed to shirk. But for the tanning of weeks of sun and wind I should have blushed in the ingenuous face of Mont Blanc. I did indeed refrain from the kind of remarks that seemed to be called for. But I came last down the melting steps on the awkward ice wall under the pass—in a speaking silence.

Under the circumstances I was not surprised, as we trudged away down the glacier, and were passing once again below the usual start up the Requin, that its ascent—which we had left uncompleted in the morning—was suggested to me as a sop.

The dark rocks overhanging in shade offered at least a change from the liquefying glare upon the mid-day glacier. A raid, too, which would have the character of a revenge, chimed in with the ill-humour of the moment.

On my first visit to the Aiguilles, four of us had spent some twenty wicked hours upon the insidious little peak. Misled as to the route by the misstatements of some worser Chamonix guides—from whose threats of maltreatment in the valley I had still, in those distant days, to protect my 'foreigner' Knubel—we had assaulted the great Requin buttress directly up from the Mer de Glace, and so made, unwittingly, a first ascent as difficult as that of the Dru. On the descent from the summit by the great chimney we had been hindered by darkness, and had had to abandon the greater part of our rope; and, for four of us on a short fifty-foot rope, the following hours of our return down the enormities of the buttress survived as a palpitating, if proud, memory.

Still more destructive, of temper and garments, had been our subsequent midnight grope down the glassy ripples of the Mer de Glace. Upon ages of ice, molten and refrozen to a torture of slipperiness, we fell about for hours like cross ninepins, our feet slithering and splitting to all points of the compass, and only our heads thudding in orderly sequence on the stone-hard surface. At such times everyone else's fall seems a wilful insult, our own a wanton injury. We had lost the sack with the food, and in the intervals of resentful silence, and of sullen jerkings at the rope, we sketched out imaginary banquets. In a sense they were realized, for I never remember otherwise after a climb drinking four bottles of brown beer, one of lemonade, and three cups of black coffee without any sensible lessening of thirst. It was, in short, a memory of the Requin that called for a return match.

Thomas flung himself heroically at the cliffs. So convulsively did he sprint up them, that on the beautiful rock spiral by which the final pinnacle is climbed, a surprising corkscrew of flake and crack and joke which makes the Requin a joy to recall—and to climb always once again—he collapsed upon a ledge to recuperate; and so left me to the rare pleasure of finishing and enjoying in solitude the summit of a great alpine peak.

In the high friendly sunlight the sky and the wonderful circle of mountains crept very close, for company, as they do only when we are alone. Tranquillity returned with them. The disappointment of the morning evaporated. Human worries,

inflated and highly-coloured Zeppelins as they look to be over our life upon the plains, have a soap-bubble habit if ever we puff them out and up among the hills. They explode comically, one by one as we think of them, into little smears of froth, and fizzle into oblivion.

Thomas and I were to meet Donald Robertson and the porters at the foot of the icefall of the col du Géant ; where we intended to bivouac for some days. But Donald chanced to be inventing one of his lightning routes up the left side of the glacier while we were getting free of the Requin and wandering more conventionally down the centre of the ice-wilderness. Upon that immense and broken surface the eye sees but a little way, and the voice carries not much farther. It was only the timely panic of a strayed wander-tourist, too breathless after his flight athwart the glacier from the neighbourhood of Donald's pursuing series of maniac shouts to be able to escape unquestioned when he found himself by accident within the orbit of ours, that at last enabled us to effect a junction.

Once again we were grateful to the glacial sprites who make grottoes under apparently prostrate rocks, drape them with green moss, and set crystal springs at their hidden entries. For the night sang itself in about our cave with a chorale of electric storms. The incessant hiss of miles of hail steaming over the long grey glaciers filled our ears with desolation. When we are out in the open, and must remain inactive, while the big shapes and forces of mountain or ocean about us are churning themselves up into an angry mood, the addition of any continuous noise, hail-ring or wind, surf-beat or thunder, increases our feeling of powerlessness before them almost unbearably. We cramped sleepless through a long night, while the feet of the thunder trampled over our roofing and our nerves, and the reverberations shook a discord of rock-falls out of every precipice that repeated them. In the morning we fled—once again—over fresh snow to the Montenvers.

Clearly it was to be Knubel or nihil. Robertson offered to return him for a day, in exchange for the humour of the Thomas Saga at full length. In the result I went to bed too late that night : neither to sleep, nor to waken as I should. High mountain atmospheres specialize in a certain brand of thin transparent sleep, wherethrough the twilight mind is oppressed with a despair of its own friendlessness, wherein the present seems ashes and our only future dust, and whereby the thought of the dark cold mountains clustering without is

prolonged as a formless terror presiding over our quaverings in and out of semi-consciousness. Josef roused me reproachfully. I shivered at the starless murk beyond the window, and almost spoke the craven wish that it was just a little cloudier.

Our packing never took much time: in the sack little more than the weight of jam, chocolate and raisins. For, after a precept of Matthew Arnold, our provisioning had to be all—"sweetness—and light." A last long yawn as we met the night air; and then we stabbed our spirits awake on the porcupine jags of the track.

As we started to race up the glacier, we were warned of our belatedness by the fitful glinting of four or five lanterns scattered up the hours of obscurity ahead. The open crevasses met our faces with tepid breathings of stale air, vapours that agree so ill with the recollection of a candle-end breakfast off lukewarm coffee-grounds. Day broke all too soon. From a panting, bent-knee roll up the mounting ice, we broke into a run, hoping still to overtake time. Lantern after lantern we passed unsociably, keeping our breath for our legs: since running up a crevassed glacier is very preoccupying. The foremost of our precursors, seven Italian guides returning over the pass to Courmayeur, we dashed upon as they sheltered dimly at the foot of the Géant icefall. Ironically they assured us that they were not 'resting,' only terror-bound by the nightmare clatter of pursuing feet. We knew the icefall well that season, and came out on to its higher plateau of snow at the end of a two-and-a-half-hours' run from the Montenvers.

Soon after this we roped, and turning right-handed, pressed outward and up on to the white desert of the glacier de la Vallée Blanche, before the sun had more than begun to soften its susceptible heart. We chanced upon a happy line through the unsystematized crevasses; and, as the sun gained power, dragged more heavily upward over clogging snow to the foot of the blinding snow wall under the south-east face of the Aiguille du Midi.

Behind our backs, meanwhile, the weather was beginning to make ominously over the Italian frontier. We breakfasted, morosely, with its threat in our eyes; and then turned straight-way up the central rocks of the face, short-cutting for the summit, on a direct but rock-rotten line which probably might be classed as one of twenty 'new' ascents up this side of the peak. Five and a half hours from the Montenvers found us on the top, and at the start of our real business of the day, the traverse of the second crescent; but this time from its opposite end.

We stood in an unwelcome wind, and glowered down through a purl of snow-flakes at the last white flick of our prospective ridge against the rocks below our feet. At least, we thought, to follow it would be all on our way home. If at any point the conditions became worse, we were confident we could force some route down off its edge and follow one of the tributary glaciers down to the Mer de Glace.

The misted dark rock of the north-eastern shoulder of the Midi launched us with a rush on to the sylphine crest of snow and ice that flickers down towards the inferior col du Plan. In a good season this crest might be a careless snow-glide. Upon the first few windings of its edge the snow was comfortably crusted for a canter. But, as we descended, gradually harder snow, and even ice, forced upon us spells of laborious step-cutting down angles just mild enough to make the necessity irritating. Ice-claws, here again, would have saved us a lot of time. The white thong along which we were balancing then lashed steeply down towards the pass; and in order to evade its Twistian appeals for 'more' steps, we made the mistake of dodging down a subsidiary snow-corner on its southern flank. We had hoped to find softer snow further down upon the wall, across which we could traverse on to the face of the pass. But the corner snapped off viciously, and trapped us into a sensational hazard down an ice-cliff. We lost much time and height before we could cut free of it, and slant upwards, along dubious and very strange snow, out on to the little pass.

Ahead of us, now, we were gazing up at what we expected to prove the crux of the crescent, the truncated aiguille which blocks the ridge. As seen, in profile, from the Mer de Glace, the sheer shrug of its western epaulet had looked quite as discouraging as had its eastern shrug to Thomas, from the Aiguille du Plan. But a second, diagonal view, which we had obtained a short time before from the col du Géant, had hinted at some hopeful overlapping in the welding of the snow ridge with the rock precipice. Unusual as such a structure would be, the white edge had seemed to us to be sliding in behind its rock interruption.

Triumphantly, as we advanced, we saw now our speculation confirming itself. The sheerness of the rock epaulet proved to be only a bluff, a faked scenic effect. Behind its sham screen our white ridge whisked in genially: to end indeterminately among the broken rocks of the northerly face of the aiguille. By an easy couloir we scrambled up this face, and regained the firm upper rim of the screen, above its prohibitive shrug. We

were soon taking breath on the headless summit. I learned only later that it had been climbed another way by Sir Edward Davidson many years before ; and its dilapidation would appear to have been hastened by his refusal to recognize, by naming it, that it had at least laudable intentions of ranking as an Aiguille.¹

We found that at any rate its easterly shoulder, the ridge at which I had been looking a few days before from the Aiguille du Plan, was all that Chamonix rock should be: red, solid, precipitous, defiant in sword-edges, and yet merciful with crack and splinter. We could only mourn that its reach proved so short. Down the perpendicular southern facet of the last step—Thomas's "impossible wall"—a heart-warming little rift coaxed us on to a yellow bracket, just above the ice-slope which leads on to the pass. Upon this we lunched like huddled parrots. Then we lowered ourselves on to the steep ice, and in a few minutes had cut cautiously round below the rock pedestal, and up on to the white (and superior) col du Plan:—doubting Thomas's "weeks of step-cutting" !

The blustering squalls, sleet-slaps, and thunder-gruffles, which had so far only deserved the disconcerted ear we are forced to lend to the tunings of an orchestra, seized the moment of our halt to assail us with a more concerted interlude. Simultaneously, white butterfly snow-storms, which had been for some hours opening and shutting their wings uncertainly against the dark background of peaks to the south, now turned to charge in ranks upon the wind, and committed suicide in icicles against the rope and our moustaches. But the rally came too late. Our vital junction had been made. What remained to be traversed of our shortened crescent, the ascent of the Aiguille du Plan from its col, could well be classed with those climbs which Alexander Burgener considered suitable for Sabbath-breaking excursions, "the sort of places the Devil himself couldn't pull you off!" For our comfort, too, we had the suspicion at the back of our minds—anyone who has a feel for weather knows it—that the snow-squalling was not quite in earnest, it protested in too great a fluster. So we covered our ears with helmets, and went up and down the spire of the Plan without a halt, concerned only to keep ourselves warm and to fill in the time of the storm-intermezzo.

¹ Recently it has been given the name of the Rognon du Plan ; and it remains to be seen whether the name has point enough to spare some to the aiguille.

Hardly had we descended once again upon the pass, when we were rewarded by a transformation-scene such as only great mountains can design. On a great break of stillness the inky snow-clouds rolled up silkily, like the curling, dissolving ashes of burnt paper ; and a lambent sunlight dripped in silvery pools through the flurried remnants of mist. Within the minute the wet, blackening ridges round us were rustling with the melt and shift of snow. The lowering sky leaped away from off our heads in gulfs and straits of watery electric blue. Under the hot direct rays the moist and exaggerated colouring of the rocks blanched momentarily paler ; and the louder shouting of the great glaciers, as the muffle of cloud and wind cleared from between our height and their depth, from between the saving sunshine and their liberated streams, promised us the certainty of a radiant afternoon.

The fight against the snow-gusts had, up to this point, put all idea of the Dent du Requin out of mind. It had been sufficient, for the confusion of thought which a batter of wind induces, that we had been able to persist to the finish of our main ridge. But now that we were back on the pass, in fair still weather, the peace of noon began to murmur from afar, of a reward in rock-fun and reflected sun-glow for the struggle with the ice-ridge and the blustorous morning. It was indeed too late to reascend the Plan, and attempt the unclimbed ridge to the Requin—the scene of Thomas's initial doubt ! But our crescent would be almost as artistically complete if we swerved down the glacier from the pass, and climbed the Requin by the ordinary way.

Discreetly I hinted to Josef the geometrical propriety of finishing the arc with this ascent, as I chipped steps below him down the sloppy ice-wall of the pass. He grinned down at me over his anchored axe : “ For the last hour, Herr Jung, I have been wondering how soon you would suggest it ! ” I have no doubt that Josef himself cherished an immoral wish to cut down Thomas's ‘ record time ’ upon the Requin, of a few days before. And he, too, still owed the peak a grudge for the hours of misguided effort we had once spread thickly over its buttresses, as well as for the unconscionable amount of rope it had forced us on that occasion to leave behind. To warring climbers of Josef's Spartan tradition the rope has the sanctity of a shield. If hard-pressed, they may come down ‘ on ’ it. But they must never fail to return home ‘ with ’ it. To be driven to abandon it after it has been used as a fixed length, is tantamount to an admission of defeat.

We allowed ourselves a long dream on the hot ledges above the glacier, at the start of the climb. The adventure, so far, had been more varied and more exacting than that of the Nantillons crescent the year before. Muscles and thoughts were glad to part company for a little, the one to rest, the other for the relaxation of a coloured drift through vacancy. No sooner, however, had we reassembled them than I perceived that Josef was all agog for the quick riot of good rock. Now the waist-chuck of an impetuous rope ahead interferes with the digesting of pleasant impressions—without which I used to be assured that mountaineering is only parlour-tricks and pace. So I left Josef to coil it up, and stole away in freedom, up and over the familiar castle wall of the peak.

He had overtaken me before the more serious climbing began, upon the far side of the bartizan'd wall, where a descending glacis leads to the surprising sequence of chimneys and flakes by which the final keep is circumvented. The slabs were in uplifting humour: the succession of honest vertical escalades only anxious to please. We treated them like the old friends they were, informally; chuckled joyfully up the last rock corkscrew that twirls us so amazingly into clean high space; and were perched upon its point in fifty-two minutes from the glacier.

Through the tremulous clearness of air that follows storm the level rays of the sun wavered towards us in ripple-lengths of light like bright reeds seen under a mill-race. Our tobacco-smoke floated upward in unbroken rings over our heads. As we sat back to back on the table of stone, and looked out our different ways over the attractive irregularity of the white world, we began to discuss in what form we should wish our spirits to revisit the scene: for to this central sun-point in space of course they must return. The eagle, I think, had it in the end, over the snow-flake and the chamois.

An isolated growl of thunder out of a cloudless sky drove us off needlessly soon. The swing-off down the big chimney, a chute which is used on the descent alone, and in which we had formerly left our rope hanging, was this time rightly manoeuvred. Josef was merciless in his vindictive technique. On the brant slab at the chimney foot, where we paused to coil up the rope, he waved me ahead, pursued me down the castle wall to the glacier with the imperceptible arrivalism of a lizard, and only thawed into humanity, and a grin, when I gave him our time from the summit as thirty-eight minutes: for, had not Thomas's record been ten minutes slower each way?

There was indeed always something uncanny or reptilian about Knubel's fashion of descending easy rock. I looked back : there he was, thirty feet above me, holding the rope, motionless. I blinked, and looked again : there he was, three feet above me, holding the rope, motionless as before. But as to what had happened between, or when that what had happened, or how, neither sight nor sound ever helped me to discover.

We made honourable amends to the Mer de Glace for our disrespectful rush up it in the morning. Nothing could have been more deferential than our gait of return to the Montenvers. Between the last taste of the hotel coffee-grounds and the first flavour of the hotel tea-leaves this our second crescent had enriched us by fifteen hours of thrilling life, and not a dull breath drawn. We had been forced to slur over one link in the chain, passing from the clasp of the Plan to the pendant of the Requin along the glacier and not over the ridge. But the good guide Dibona has since made this connexion ; and now the crossing of the whole crescent, one of the finest circuits in the Aiguilles, awaits the emprise of later hands and feet. Which is as it should be, in mountaineering.

CHAPTER IX

DAYS WITH FRIENDS

Fire made them, earth clothed them, man found them,
our playmates, the princes of hills :
last uttered of time, and love-fashioned
of a fullness of knowledge impassioned
for freedom : boy hearts, royal wills,
sun nursed them, wind taught them, frost crowned them.

UPON a shoulder of Snowdon or among the Fells we used to meet at this time once or twice in the course of each winter, a company of men, women and even children, of diverse ages and interests. The mountain atmosphere provided a common inspiration excellent for social purposes. Our ideas and our muscles alike were kept agreeably on the stretch ; and for a few days a very perfect society reminiscent of the conditions of the golden age fused itself out of our individual oddities. Once again, and by chance, we made the familiar discovery that the activity of the body, properly developed and guided, could interpret as effectively as any speech or writing such graces as might exist in the mind. At the same time the clash of wits, the sympathetic criticism felt but unspoken, and the mutual understanding which must emerge in any entirely natural society served to modify each original egoism, maintained a right balance between elements too exclusively intellectual or too enthusiastically athletic, and kept every chance assembly casual, unselfconscious and light-hearted.

Charles Donald Robertson, urbane and accomplished in mind as he was strenuous upon the hills, contributed perhaps more than any other to the recovery of this tradition. Among the notable younger men who associated themselves with it George Leigh Mallory was conspicuous, strenuous and unsparing of himself in mind as he was superb in physique and accomplished in mountain action. That both should have fallen in the pursuit of their ideal, the one on a mountain in Wales, the other in attaining—not improbably—the highest point on the earth's

surface, will seem to us either a sacrifice of valuable life or a contingent outcome of their belief accordingly as our temperament rejects or accepts their own point of view. To both of them life was a treasure of value; but it was also a talent to be reinvested for the profit of others. Neither hesitated to risk the loss of his share in it, if by so doing he could help to keep the great spirit of human adventure alive in the world. To men of their temperament, or vision, there can be no compromise. The spirit of man, the product at once of his disciplined strength and of his disciplined thought, must prevail, and at all times, in the man, so that it may continue to prevail in the race of men; even although this may mean for the individual life the shortening by a few years of its single effort and example.

These two joined me for a guideless campaign in the Oberland. The preliminary days of training alone with Mallory were marked by some of the hair-breadth happenings which are incidental to inexperience; and more serious work suggested itself as a corrective. So he and I set out together from Belalp, and made the first ascent of the little peak on the Dame Alys ridge, which we named *der Enkel*. The defences of its summit, twenty feet of holdless slab, a trim traverse and forty feet of sloping rock trough, recalled to us the pleasant perversities of *Lliwedd*, and Mallory countered them brilliantly. We had the unclimbed south-east ridge of the *Nesthorn*—abjured by *Clemenz*—in view that year; and we used the rest-intervals to explore our line of attack upon it. We arranged everything to our satisfaction except the weather.

Donald Robertson reinforced us; and we crossed the Oberland on a semi-circuit of ascents. The *Eiger*, the *Schreckhorn*, the *Lauteraarhorn* and some high passes employed our active hours; but the days were so full of fun, and experiment, and above all of speculative argument, that our climbing played only a secondary part. The big event of the circuit was to be the traverse of the *Finsteraarhorn* by the difficult southerly *arête*. And this, owing to its unseasonable condition, did at last succeed in catching our full attention, and in thrusting conversation, for the time, into the background.

We climbed the western wall from the *Fiescher glacier*, with an ice couloir and some cheerful step-cutting to bring us warm and ready for the fray on to the high machicolated ridge. It was sunny, but the higher cold was excessive. Every *jeuk* and jag upon the rock edge was fluffed out to look like a bridal bouquet of snow-flocks, wired upon grey and blue spun glass.

The false summit in the distance—that historic deceit—suggested on that day the humped back of a tusked and spiny mammoth, half-emerging from its bedding of rough Siberian ice. All the blues and whites of sky and snow were subdued and dulled with the cold, to the leaden tinge we see on a bare shivering skin. It was clear that we should have to fight every foot of the encumbered way up the sky before us, and our spirits rose accordantly.

Donald was to lead, and since the intricate management of the rope either way, on an interrupted ridge, always interested me, I secured second place, in the middle of the coils. It was hard and fine climbing. In and out and round and across the turrets and spikes, blocks and nocks on the edge of the narrow wall we wrestled and crackled. Every notch was snow-crested or corniced, and every pinnacle so deeply flounced with ice and snow-frond that we had to smash a way in to it with arm or leg before we could embrace its solidity.

So we buffeted our course up to and over the false summit. But the ridge beyond was even more of an arctic 'naughty-pack'; and in the cold and confusion of the long mêlée Donald at last made a false step, and disappeared in a rather nerve-shattering slide down the iced slabs above the Finsteraar glacier. However, he resumed the lead very stubbornly; and we proceeded to defeat the great slab at the foot of the final summit—none too easy a passage even when free of ice—by a joint manœuvre that gave to him and myself great satisfaction, and to Mallory, anchored on an ice-step below, almost equal amusement.

The cold upon the very high and exposed cone was positively numbing. It seemed to have curdled even the snow-skim upon the rocks; and a sour blue whey of ice glistened freezingly in the dints. During the few minutes we ventured to halt there I had to admit to myself that we were all something reduced in vitality by the strain, the chill and the acrobatics of the long ascent. I started the descent of the northern crest not a little anxiously. George gave me an extra shudder by suggesting—possibly in grave joke—that we should cut the business short by glissading down the ghastly ice-infinity of the western flank.

The tilted edge of slab which forms the upper part of the ridge we were descending was all under ice: I could find no sound hitches for the rope even on its rim. While I was labouring behind and aloft in agitation to keep some sort of anchor for the party as they crept downward, and George in the lead below was pecking little foot-nicks down the glazed slabs, I suddenly

saw the rope between him and Donald lying loosened on the rock behind his back: he had forgotten to re-rope properly when we left the summit. Possibly the combination of circumstances made me over-nervous. As it was, George looked to me so precariously placed that I was afraid of startling him into turning round by shouting to him what had happened. So I crooned to him urgently not to stir, and hissed direction to Donald to climb down to him and re-attach his rope. How do these things happen? Anyway, Donald from over-anxiety slipped out as he moved. The clatter of feet down the slab immediately behind him startled George in earnest; and as I saw him spin round like a flash on his one-foot ice-nick—well—what is it that one does feel at such seconds? Whatever it is, I felt it, all of it, as I stared down the falling curve of icy slab, over the little fluster of figures, to the glacier five thousand feet below.

My panic was unnecessary, because the reassurance of a rope never meant anything to Mallory, who was as sure-footed and as agile in recovery as the proverbial chamois. But the untowardness of these happenings did for the time rather shake our confidence and our cohesion. An icy cold up-draught began to make a greater mockery of our freezing finger and toe-holds. Never have I toiled more desperately to keep a margin of safety in reserve at the tail of a descent. It is a very long way down the Finsteraarhorn, and the mountain was in a thoroughly bad temper. It gave my struggles no support, in hitch or knob or stance; and it continued, by tricks of angle and lighting and depression, to make the friends below me look more insecure than they probably were. Before we came out on to the Hugi-sattel the wrinkles of care were ploughed furrow-deep.

We pulled ourselves together next day upon a conventional and knee-deep snow plod up the Jungfrau, with a return to Belalp. And the following morning, with the Nesthorn as our goal, on we moved round to the Ober Aletsch hut in bad weather, following our rule to get as near as possible to a climb while the evil spell lasted, in order to profit by the first instant of its break.

Certain summits defend themselves with adverse circumstance rather than with legitimate difficulty. In early years Crib Goch on Snowdon had kept fate on its side for year after year. The Bietschhorn only yielded reluctantly at the fourth attempt in my last mountaineering season; and the south-east ridge of the Nesthorn grew old as an unrealized ambition. All the first ascents of my alpine spring were linked round the

feet of this Nesthorn ; and many of them were made from the Ober Aletsch hut, with its approach through flowers and strange glacier sights, its brown cleanly cosiness and unsurpassable evening views.

The Nesthorn, seen across the glacier from the hut, stands as a ruddy and gallant pyramid. The northern glaciers are drawn up in a white cowl over its red helmet and rust-red shoulder-pieces ; and their overflowing borders fringe with silver its burning shield of southerly precipice. In a flying span the south-east ridge bisects this shield : from the hut visible as a mounting skyline of sentinel towers, standing on guard, as a challenge to our fancy, against the orange of sunset or through the hard frostiness of a starlit night. Fancy, indeed, so often passed up that ridge. But our feet went always astray. From Belalp it is only to be reached over the Unterbächhorn or by turning movements, up from the Ober Aletsch or the Gredetsch glaciers on either side. By all these ways I had tried for it. Once from the Ober Aletsch, when we were side-tracked by the temptation of a new ridge up to the Belgrat. Once from the Gredetschthal, when a direct first ascent of the south face of the Nesthorn proved too attractive. And once a local cow-herd and I sat out all a cold night near the summit of the Unterbächhorn itself. But in the morning the long perspective of the two miles of white-frozen pinnacles disenchanted him, and we wasted the day in efforts to climb down into the Gredetschthal and to return upward up on to our ridge further along : a faint and foolish scheme.

I remember that as we stumbled down that afternoon off the dry bones of ridge and glacier, night-parched and with the dust and disappointment in our throats and eyes, we dipped into a fold upon the alp deep with hot grass and wild flowers. Some grazing cattle were clustering together at its further end. "Unser Moritz !"—grunted my herd, jerking a grin over his shoulder to call my attention to them. The cluster broke up at our passing, and I saw a small tow-headed boy flat on his face in the grass, with nothing on but his boots, the sun gleaming off his back, and two of his more persistent charges—whether from affection or more probably for the savour of salt—still nuzzling at his bare brown shoulders. The pastoral group might have been designed as a contrast to the harsh and colourless age of the heights we had just left. It laughed at our disgruntlement ; and, in complete amity once more, his father and I hurried on, undiscovered by the tiny Pan.

So it came about that we were now going to make another try from the Ober Aletsch glacier; with the intention, since the weather still looked dubious, of short-cutting up the northern glaciers on to the little pass under the south-east ridge. We should thus evade the longer approach, over the Unterbächhorn and along the following miles of connecting ridge.

But the night and the morning only darkened the clouds, and blanched the showers into wet snow-squalls over the glacier. We scowled at them for a while from the hut, at the snow clouds blackening just overhead, and at the snowfall whitening on the glacier much further below; and then let them hunt us in company back to Belalp.

Satisfied that we had gone to ground under a torpor of hot milk-cocoa in the hotel lounge, the storm chuckled to itself with wide gleams of sun, and tore away to chase other climbers down distant valleys. We stayed hidden until it was gone, and then stole out. But it was already evening; too late to return upward for a night in bivouac or hut. No alternative remained but an all-night tramp, on the chance of finding the new-fallen snow kindly disposed on some ridge next morning. Under such conditions the Nesthorn could hardly be attempted, and a guide seemed a necessary precaution to simplify for us the night approach to any climb we might choose. We knocked up the whole village in the course of the dark hours; but our taunts, flung in handfuls after our pebbles through the chalet windows, failed to provoke one irate sleeper into accompanying us, even on a modest traverse of the Aletschhorn.

At about three o'clock in the morning we grew weary of conversational triumphs over sleepy and angry voices; and started off, rather cross and stale, on the line of least resistance from Belalp, which meant up towards the Unterbächen glacier. We told ourselves that we were only going to see what condition the rocks were in. There was a thick wool of dirty white mist round our faces; and underfoot, even on the lower alps, a slush of puddly grey snow. I at once lost the goat-track, and we blundered crabbedly on, guiding ourselves erratically by following the general upward trend of the slopes.

At last a thicker greyness bumped at us steeply through the fog, and we knew that we must have hit the foot of the old snow deposits, piled up below the nose of the Unterbächen glacier. We had been trudging for some three hours through cold hail and wet and windy snowfall. There was not a gleam of light or of thinning mist to encourage us. We had already

used several pretences to tempt ourselves on up just the next slope, and still the next. For, by all the 'doctrine of the alternates' this ought to be a fine day, and we ought to get a climb. But the change that sometimes comes with dawn now remained our only chance ; and what excuse could suffice to keep three chilled and drowsy men hanging about in a foggy darkness of snow for that one improbable event ? Invention was exhausted. And then a wild idea suggested itself. Days before, while we were searching round the glacier above for a possible gîte, Mallory had lost a sweater. It was white and dirty, and so was the snow that had fallen on it since. But still we could hardly turn back after all that abominable plod without making some formal search for it. I threw the proposal in as a last stake, with the recklessness of despair. Donald has told us how it appealed to him.¹ He gasped and doubled up with its absurdity ; and his laughter growing as he realized more and more its qualities as a joke, he dashed ahead up the slopes, and swept us up the snow, and up the ice-dribbled rock lip below the glacier, and even up and across the narrow glacier itself, before we had time to bethink ourselves again.

Suddenly day broke—it was already seven o'clock—the woolly fog filmed into transparent gauze about our faces, touching our cheeks with the high, faint, curling tongues of mist that often crown an ebbing tide of cloud. The red rocks of the Unterbächhorn began to stare through, animated by a fresh ice-glaze, which winked and blinked slyly across our heads at a hurry of late flustered sunrise. In a few seconds the cloud had sunk to our shoulders ; and over it our astonished grins greeted one another, like small cheerful islands projecting above a desert of grey sea. Another moment, and the tide had fallen below our feet, to lie in a murky day-long pall over all lower slopes and valleys. With it passed our staleness and our depression. Better than fresh vigour, better than a night's rest, is it to know that we are out and away, by our own enterprise, for the hours of a stolen climbing day, while the rest of the mountaineering world is growling and glowering through hotel windows into a waste of deceitful fog.

On the base of the rocks we breakfasted, defying more happily than Canute the grey surf to overtake our boots. A few loftier friends, the snowy perfection of the Weisshorn, the rather self-conscious aristocracy of the Matterhorn, and the careless royalty of Monte Rosa, looking a little like the 'White Queen' with

¹ *Alpine Humour*, 'Alpine Journal,' XXV, p. 127.

glacier robes and jet coronets put on anyhow, saluted us across the level expanse of mist, partners in our secret. But we took two hours to climb the Unterbächhorn; for the ledges were slimy and cold with fresh snow, and even the familiar chimney up the last spire made merry with twinkling ice.

Nine o'clock and on the summit. Quite a reasonable hour to reach one's peak—if that peak were all. But immediately on its farther side, and below our feet, the long serrated ridge lept into sight, stretching itself out fascinatingly towards the far southern shield of the Nesthorn. Even if it fought us too long and too late, could we not still cheat darkness by descending from it on to the Aletsch glacier, or on the other side into the Gredetschthal? I looked at the weather for its decision. The morning was sulky, with uneven Tuscan-red lighting and a cold wind. But the high clouds were ravelling out, there was a feeling of betterment in the air, and the first two miles of ridge, not high enough to be weather-armed, suggested no difficulty inconsistent with safety even under doubtful conditions. Adventure gained the day; while caution covered itself with a plea of 'necessary exploration.'

The ridge at once took hold of us; it set us going at our best pace and in very creditable combination. Think of it!—two and something miles of selected ridge climbing: pinnacle and tower and wind-balanced knife-edge, notch and comb and up-ended slab. No evasions were possible on that day: the snow-draped flanking walls pinched us on to the very crest of the arête. From the top of one or two towers we had to descend by swarming down the doubled rope: a very good lesson for some of our party who were still incredulous of its necessity upon any rock, or of its time-saving uses in the Alps.

The muscular output was tremendous; for the continuity of the ridge, neither rising nor falling, nor growing harder nor easing off, was so persistent that we had never a reason for varying the pace or for slackening in our steady pursuit of the clock. I have not often traversed a ridge that put such a premium upon good combined climbing, or developed so much consciousness of a real rhythm of the rope. It was a delight to picture the passage of the Hopkinsons along it in the reverse direction, after their first descent of the Nesthorn ridge, with Slingsby, fourteen years before. I had heard so often from eye-witnesses that the combination of the famous brothers was a model of what teamwork might be made.

Our impetus carried us up and over the high point in the

ridge (3,617) in little more than a single revolution of our Manx-leg formation. Thence we dropped on to the little pass (3,533). But I do not remember that we there gave a glance or thought to our proposed timely retreat down from the ridge, either into the Gredetschthal or on to the Ober Aletsch glacier. The grand Nesthorn arête, storming above us into the sky in sheer tower and step and brow, held all our eyes. Had it been past one o'clock we might have hesitated. But it was only half-past twelve. We had the whole afternoon before us, and a habit of elastic forward movement in our limbs and muscles that could not be gainsaid.¹ If we could but cross the summit by five o'clock I felt that we might trust to my memory of the northern, snowy side of the peak, to secure us some safe line of descent to the glacier by nightfall. Anyhow, the chief difficulty lay in circumventing the four great towers which mounted guard like sentinels on the nearer crest of the ridge. If these were all passed in good time, we knew from our inspections of the profile that we might hope to make yet better time upon the section of ridge above them.

We put our best foot foremost, prepared to fashion its path with our most trenchant step-cutting. The first two towers wasted their formidable opposition by waiting for us too far down the arête, where the crest they should have blocked flattened out a little as it dipped towards the pass. We were able to turn them, therefore, delicately but safely round their southern bases, upon sloping pedestal slabs moderately free from snow.

The second two had chosen better positions, barring the steepening and contracted edge very effectively. Below them, on the south side, the flanking precipice fell almost perpendicularly: no traverse was possible across those red slabs. On the north side the fit was not so perfect; the slabs from which the towers sprang hesitated, and wavered outward for a few feet before they took their final plunge. But the northern shadows had crusted these curves with ice and surface-snow in process of interpenetration. To cut steps across such pastry called for

¹ Upon the ridge of Mount Everest Mallory and Irvine were last seen at this hour and in about the same relation to the summit. At this point Mallory must have had to make the same choice, whether to push on to the summit or to retreat. The risk of failure upon Everest was greater, but the difficulties still remaining were less, and the inducements to advance infinitely stronger. I have no doubt Mallory made the same decision which we had made together in not very dissimilar circumstances upon the Nesthorn. This being so, I think they probably reached the summit.

great nicety of touch. A light stroke of the axe made no impression. A heavy blow sent a whole flake crashing into space, and left bare an ugly lurch of bald rock.

While traversing under the first tower I had to run out the whole of our rope before I could get footing sound enough to pause upon. The steps were in any case no more than knife-scars on a fragile cake-icing; and during the passage under the dark overhang of the last tower the whole of our rope was not enough, and we were all three strung out airily on the faltering slabs at the same time. Our progress here was deliberate and very gentle. Our feet and axes brushed the ice-bloom on the rocks as lightly as a bee passing upon a flower. It was with some relief that we at last swarmed up and back on to the backbone of the arête behind the left ear of this fourth sentinel, and could warm ourselves in a suave pretence of sunlight and with the triumphant view backward and downward over the four grim and separate conquered heads. But for their over-eager and ill-chosen footing those gigantic watchmen might well have kept the bridge unclimbed for another ten years.

It was already four o'clock. But there could now be no question of turning back. A retreat would only mean a benightment somewhere on the windy ridge. An advance might carry us over the summit, and on to some chance of shelter on its easier northern snows, by dark. Had the weather promised ill for the night I should not have made this choice. To risk a fine night out may be permissible under circumstances. To take the same risk in bad weather is wholly unsound. The look of the day throughout had been unsettled but not unreassuring. The wind-broken sunshine, splashed here and there on the wrack of cloud that scudded below us over the valleys or flapped like sails tearing loose from their spars among the rock needles of our ridge, had preserved always something of a brick-red tone. I state no theory. But, as the result of watching closely many such days of gusty and alternating weather, I came to accept the absence of all blue tints, such as transform these red lights to mauve, sulky purple or angry crimson, as signifying at least that no immediate or hasty change for the worse was to be feared. More than this assurance we do not ask for during days of this uncertain temper.

The red, russet, and ice-capped steps and noses of the narrow ridge mounted precipitously above us, bending out of sight against a race of clouds across the sky. Some were vertical, some appeared to be overhanging; but the recollection of their



Belgrat

South-East Ridge

NESTHORN
from the East

skyline profile recalled to us that they could only be steps, and that we were now past the last of the independent towers. That is to say, we had only to get up them in front, not to get down them behind as well. Any yard we forced upward was a permanent gain in height. Unlike their four bolder protagonists, the rear-rank sentinels were propping their resistance by leaning against the ridge behind them. A shoulder or a head, once reached, would thus serve us as a firm basis from which to assault the knees of our next opponent.

We assaulted them in ladder-like succession, the knights red, green, and yellow of Malory's "*Le Morte d'Arthur*," one after the other, and directly up their frontal edges. It was no day for hammering and clambering round their ice-mailed sides. The chinks in their greaves and their cuirasses gave firm if small and distant holds. It was a very rapid and furious attack, with the warning rays from a burnished sun-disk almost level in our eyes across the jagged cliffs of the southern face. We did not stop to count our slain, and I have no memory of the details of their several brief resistances. One champion alone we feared, the irresistible 'black night': and that blindfold combat we might still hope to escape.

At last we found ourselves at the foot of the dark tower which shows conspicuously on the skyline, as the last great obstacle upon the ridge. To us below, its summit had all the appearance of yet another independent spire, overhanging on all its three visible sides. But we knew that this Titan also must be propping his shoulders against the supporting *arête* behind. The ridge above would be ours if we could but grip him within his guard, and tug him by the red beard, and finally get some hold upon his nodding fringe of snowy curls.

Leaving Donald as our anchor in a rock ingle at the foot of the bulging north wall, George and I clambered twenty feet up the edge of the tower and on to a triangular bracket that broke its precipitous profile. Above us, the slabs shot up sheer, and ended under a hopeless penthouse of projecting rock. I craned round the edge and looked across the southern face of the tower. Downward, the fluted red-rent crags rushed into nothingness: over the rim of the shelf upon which we stood the eye plunged disconcertingly, until it met the gleam of the glacier far and deep below in the Gredetschthal. Upward, the crags of this southern face rose vertically for twenty feet, and then all further sight of them was cut off by the cornice jutting above our heads against the wind-speed of the clouds.

Discouraged upon this side, I leant round the other corner of the slabby edge and looked across the darker northern face of the tower. For some ten feet above our heads the shattered organ-pipes on the face looked practicable ; but there, just where the rock began to give back, a huge mass of snow, or probably snow-ice, had attached itself to the roughness of the face, like a lump of ivy on an old church tower or a great fungoid growth on a tree-trunk. It was far too big to be cleared away, and its face or outside surface was undercut, the steepest snow wall I have seen except upon the broken upper lip of a bergschrund. Supposing that the face of this mass could be climbed, and that the mass held to the wall, it looked possible to creep along its sloping upper surface to the foot of a small icy chimney between some higher organ-pipes ; and, by this, mount to the edge of the ridge again, where it emerged from under the rear helmet-peak of the tower. There seemed, indeed, to me to be more ' supposing ' than support upon this northern face. I had been working in the lead for some ten hours without halt, and hesitated before the bold effort of strength and faith which the insecure snow wall would clearly require.

Meanwhile, George had been making his own examination of the flutings on the south face, and on my return to the mantel-piece he remarked confidently that he thought it would go. The effortless ease with which he wound up rocks which reduced me to convulsive struggling gave me reason to hope that he might be right. It was for emergencies such as this that the younger and more brilliant cragsmen of the party had been so far, somewhat selfishly, kept in reserve upon the rope. And selfishness had still another share in the decision ; because a change of leader at this point would mean some useful rest before we began the race with darkness down the crevassed glaciers of the north face : a last lap, for which every hoarded faculty and every pound of energy and experience might be needed.

We changed places on the rope. At about my shoulder level, as I leaned against it, there was a nick on the extreme south corner of the slab. Across this I could pass George's rope, and as my footing was good and my two hands could hold and spring the rope conveniently on either side of the nick, I felt certain of keeping the belay sufficiently ' indirect ' to be sound. George traversed out from our shelf, moving subtly across the red rib and hollow of the vertical face ; then he disappeared behind a farther volute. I could hear him ; but the rope ceased to run out. The minutes passed. He was trying for some

possible line up the smooth flutings, clinging to the wall, and with the overhang above checking each attempt. The long-continued effort must have been exhausting, for the holds over all this wall were few and inadequate, up to the level at which they ceased altogether. It was a relief to see him returning into sight, swinging agilely across the cliff on a broken line of finger-holds.

But, unexpectedly, when he reached the scoop between the two nearest upright slats, about ten feet away from me, I saw him glance upward, pause, and then begin to wrestle up it. The sight of my shelf, recalling our dangerous alternative route up the north face, may have suggested to him a last attempt on the south wall as a preferable course. So far as I could see, he had no real holds at all; but he fought his way up magnificently, until all that remained below the rock cornice, which cut off everything else above from my sight, was his two boots. They were clinging, cat-like, and continued to cling for long seconds, to almost imperceptible irregularities on the walls of the rift. The mere sight of them made me breathless; and I tightened every muscle, ready to spring the rope on its nick. For, on such foot-hold no climber would choose to wait long, were his hand-holds adequate for a lift; and if George's hand-holds were *not* adequate——!

Anyway, they did not serve for the gymnastic backward swing, outward and upward, which he was forced to risk. I saw the boots flash from the wall without even a scrape; and, equally soundlessly, a grey streak flickered downward, and past me, and out of sight. So much did the wall, to which he had clung so long, overhang that from the instant he lost hold he touched nothing until the rope stopped him in mid-air over the glacier. I had had time to think, as I flung my body forward on to the belayed rope, grinding it and my hands against the slab, that no rope could stand such a jerk; and even to think out what our next action must be—so instantaneous is thought. The boots had been standing some fifteen to twenty feet above me, so that the clear fall could not have been much less than forty feet. But the rope held, springing like an elastic band, and cracking under my chest and hands on the rock. We were using that year a then rather popular Austrian woven rope, since entirely condemned. Whenever, in later years, I have looked back at the tabulated rope-tests, which show that this rope is warranted to snap like straw under the jerk of a man's weight falling from, I think, five feet, I have thought again

of the transfigured second in which I realized that the rope had, miraculously, held. The fact being, I suppose, that two rather abnormally resilient anatomies at either end of a rope may introduce a confusing element into the nicest theory of strains.

At first there was nothing to do but hold on, and watch the pendulum movement of a tense cord straining over the edge and down into space. My first cautious shouts were unanswered. Then there came, from nowhere, a tranquil call to let out more rope, and to 'lower away.' So soon as I was convinced that, owing to the good fortune of a clear fall, he had not even been hurt, I complied. The short visible length of rope slackened, and then began to jerk along the edge of the shelf on which I stood. George had spied a line of possible holds across the face of the cliff below him. As I lowered him on the rope, he coolly hooked himself in to them with his axe, and proceeded to make his way along the invisible cliff underneath me. Presently he appeared up a slanting groove, and rejoined me on the mantelshelf, apparently entirely undisturbed. He had not even let go of his axe during the fall.

The whole incident had passed so swiftly and unemotionally—I had almost said with such decorum—that Donald, twenty feet below us, and round the corner on the north face, remained unaware that anything unusual had happened. Nor did we enlighten him at the time. Immediate action was of importance, so as to waste not one of our precious moments and to leave no time for the reaction that has sometimes as ill an effect upon a party as the crisis itself. Without waiting to alter the order, I called to both end men to look after their ropes to me—which gave me a two-fold anchor—and set to work on the north face of the tower, only vexed with myself for having allowed it to frighten me before.

Not that I liked it. The crawl up and over the baffle of the snow-fungus was an anxious performance. In angle and character of hold it was not unlike that very strenuous problem, the climb up the loose, higher part of the cut wall of a haystack. Its protrusion pushed me out of balance; and I had to try for a pick-hold at arm's-length over its crest and trust to toe-holds kicked timorously up its indurating snow face. I heard myself grunt with relief as I got a friction arm-hold over the edge, on the sloping snow-shelf above. I wriggled my chest up on to the slant of the shelf, and then swung up my legs, so that I lay along the narrow snow. A few caterpillar coilings, and then at last I found a finger-hold on the smooth

rock wall behind my snow-fungus. This reduced my interest in the question of the stability of the whole jerry-built attachment. I wormed along the shelf on my chest, with finger-holds on the wall and feet kicking in air, until I could force my shoulders into the lower end of the ice-chimney between the higher organ-pipes, and so stand upright on a solid once again, and pant comfortably. A few seconds later I was up the chimney, and sitting astride of the sharp snowy neck that joined the head of our tower to the backbone of the main ridge. If only the severe but short and well-protected effort had not been shirked a long half-hour before, what nerves and minutes we might have saved!

With our remainder of daylight and of vigour now still further diminished, we had to economize both, if we were yet to make a way down the north face before night. I determined at once to follow a course which I held to be the most suitable, theoretically, in such an emergency. Mallory was unhurt and unshaken; so was our confidence in him. The continuance of the ridge above us looked stern in the falling dusk, but seemed moderately free of snow. So, again our finest and fastest rock climber passed ahead on the rope.

He appeared, through the shadows, to float like a thistle-down up the last abrupt steps: up and up, through always denser cold and closer darkness. Now and again my eye was half-caught by a splash of light like an aureole that came and went over his stir of shadow moving above me. And then I saw that this was George's long hair, roughed out by the wind and catching or losing as he climbed the level of the last sunlight lifting above the ridge. Even the austerity of the final brow, which arched smoothly and darkly upward against the summit snows and frowned sullenly out upon the evening, gave him no pause. The unmistakable feel of the wind that tells us there is nothing now between us and open skies met our faces. A short race along the icy crest, and over rock bosses that spiked like huge red horse-chestnuts out of the snow, and we stood together on the silvery tip of the highest cone.

Seven o'clock by the watch. Twelve hours since our start up the rocks of the Unterbächhorn, and with hardly a halt or longer relaxation than an occasional glance round at the promise of the weather.

The last phase of sunset seemed to have been waiting for us, and greeted our eyes across the summit with a long horizon of copper-coloured surf. The breakers of light were beating

upon the far sides of the Bietschhorn and of the western Oberland peaks. They sprayed round the mountain edges and across the passes towards us in spurts of gold, and ran in a spent wash of silvery bronze up the nearer snows to our feet. Behind us, to the east, the sunward slopes of the Aletschhorn, of the Finsteraarhorn, and of their white neighbours were beginning to deflect the warm and coloured lighting from their facets in a colder order of tones; and already the pallor of alpine sleep was creeping upon their great snow faces and chilling through the ruddy reflections.

There are evenings in the Alps when the sunset pours out its whole colour-box on to the sky above us, but when the snow peaks, the glaciers, and the rock walls about us will have none of it. They remain colourless, ghostly, and unreceptive; as we may see the forms and faces of sleepers in a dark room startled only into outline and a resentful pallor by the passage of a candle. And there are evenings when every corner of rock, every snow prism, and every ripple of falling glacier, catches fire and colour, and contributes its own varied light to the illumination.

Our few moments of triumph on the summit were transfigured by this blaze of sympathetic celebration. The nearer rock spires reached up towards us their late glowing torches. The recession of snow peaks along the Oberland bore each its dying beacon, ash-red at the heart and hurrying gold at the edges. The uneven snow on the northern slopes descending from our feet caught the shallow waves of retreating colour, and threw them back lower and fainter at each instant as the sun sank. Until the interrupting rock crests of the north ridge hemmed the rays finally beyond our sight; and the snows about us took shelter from the cold inrush of darkness under a uniform monotony of steely disregard.

We were, in fact, in time to overtake the last message of the sunset, but we had no leisure even for food. Very rarely have we been so late upon a peak, and never, elsewhere, but of intention. In a sense we had won; but at a price. We had bought the thrill of victory somewhat dearly, with the sacrifice of the most precious moments of a mountaineering day, the midday moments when we can rest relaxed and apart from each other in sunshine, and abandon ourselves to the realization of a purpose happily fulfilled, and to the mere irrational rapture of unthinking and untroubled well-being.

The winds of day had kept a firm surface on the snow, and

evening was hardening it to the spring of primeval turf. Literally we galloped down the crest of the easy north arête, keeping high and near the edge, so as to borrow the guidance of the last rays of direct light as they ebbed away from us through the rocky bluffs. I was uncertain which of the two great snowy cwms, which run side by side up to the ridge from the Ober Aletsch glacier, might be the right one to follow that year; the choice used to vary according to the condition of their crevasses. We took the first because it was the nearest; and, turning sharply right-handed off the ridge, half cantered, half glissaded down the snow-wall of its upper amphitheatre.

As we plunged downward, the evening shadows rose to meet us; altering the snows under our feet from oxidized grey to lilac, and then to a toneless hazy blue. The funnel contracted, and grew steeper. The cliffs of the north-east buttress of the mountain loomed higher and closer above us on our right. The crevasses began to open voracious jaws lengthways across our descent, discovering their presence through the dusk by their whiter rims, as a savage dog betrays its longing by the pale snarl of its lips. With straining eyes and every muscle braced we went at them, jumping those we could, and turning others by long zigzags. Several monsters, lying close beside one another, extended right across the whole breadth of the snow cwm; and in the search for bridges by which to cross them we had to swing at right angles again and again, and chase along between their parallel and suggestive clefts upon 'striding edges' of snow-blind ice.

The lower we plunged, the less wholesome had been the effect of the chilly day-winds, and the softer we found the snow. Where the angle of the lower slopes eased off, we kept out to the right under the rocks of the north-east buttress so as to profit by the last glimmer of westerly twilight. Darkness overtook us in the end: just too late to be dangerous, but in time to hinder us. Indeed, we only knew that we were down on the more level Ober Aletsch glacier when our feet at each step began to meet the unseen snow surface unexpectedly soon, with the slight jar of a surprise. If nothing else had told us that we had reached the glacier, the feel of this surface would soon have hammered conviction into our tired senses; for it changed to the dragging suck of the liquid slush that in places lies deep on higher glaciers at evening. The snow-marish was crusted with an abominable skin of ice, which broke under every other step, and dipped us to the thigh in icy, sogging water.

Our return to safer levels had made us aware of our fatigue. To be stumbling and wallowing across waterlogged ice through the blackness of yet a second night out deepened this awareness almost unendurably. Mechanically and most wearily we ploughed round under the end of the buttress, and out among the more solid obstructions of the dry, moraine-covered glacier. The night became visible with stars. We untied the hard knots that had thawed and refrozen for fifteen hours about our linked adventure. And then I sat down on a flat stone, mentally and physically incapable of making one more step.

I forget what was the arrangement to which we finally came ; but presently George, whose energy was, I believe, literally inexhaustible, disappeared among the dark blocks, the concourse of petrified trolls and gnomes and toadstools that thronged down the star-glinting obscurity of the glacier. Probably he was going ahead to find the difficult start of the track up the lower marginal moraine, or to fetch a mule or a human who might persuade me up the depressing windings of the Belalp path. Need I mention that Belalp, one of the most delightful of mountain centres, stands, every evening, upon the summit of the highest peak in the Alps ? This fact, ignored by daylight surveyors, is common knowledge among all those who return late to the hotel after a long day's climb.

Donald stayed with me, a tower of support and cheering sympathy. It is during such hours of tribulation that many a companionship of the hills is deepened into friendship more lasting than our own lives. Moreover, he produced some fragments of captain's biscuits and of hardy cheese. These acted at once like raw spirit. We had not stopped to eat for more hours than I can recall, certainly not since the morning ; and now every mouthful trickled cordially to some separate languid extremity. Once before I had experienced the instantaneous effect of food upon muscle and vitality ; and it was comforting to recognize that my seeming exhaustion was, once again, only a faintness of starvation, easy to remedy. To be unable ever to feel hungry so long as we are interested, is a privilege that may have its drawbacks. Hunger is a useful warning. For lack of it, if we are far from dinner-gongs and the like reminders, it may happen that we forget to renew the fuel until nature calls a general strike. Upon the strength of the biscuits we set off, and followed down the glacier.

A friendly moon moved in and out along the velvet-black needles of the Fusshörner far overhead. Within its illuminated

tracts, as upon the circle of a magic-lantern screen, unreal peaks and glaciers were projected out of darkness into a half-dream world about me, shifting as I walked. I was certain I could see the silvered shapes of mountain and glacier-fall floating spectrally across and even through the forms of more solid shadow from which the moonlight had stolen them. And through the same silvery spaces, more than half asleep in mind, I felt myself drifting forward nebulously, a dream figure of no substance. Only my feet, somehow, had been left outside the white circle of enchantment, in an outer blackness of labouring reality. And I was conscious of them gritting and pounding along somewhere on their own account, over a crudity of rubble and ice-rut which had once been familiar to a more material self.

The magic of the moon had taken charge; and it steered us faithfully down the glacier and on to the right beginning of the unseen track over the moraine. Then it left us—to slip back into our own uninteresting selves, and to struggle with the flighty eccentricities of the Belalp path. Faster and faster we heaved our feet up it; and we arrived at the hotel, somewhere above the stars, close enough upon George's winged heels to prevent our rescue from taking any form more expensive than that of a talkative and irregular supper.

Since it was then after midnight we must have been on our feet—but for a cocoa-conference in the lounge on the first afternoon—for two days and one and a half nights; and the last twenty-two hours had been crowded with changes and chances. But of all the pictures which return to mind the most insistent is that of our moonshine pilgrimage down the last glacier. Actual precipice and ice-slope were then still about us; but they were already half transformed, by moonlight and the fancies of fatigue, into the fashion of remembered images. The ache of past effort was still present in every working muscle; and yet the change to easier, irresponsible motion over the glacier had already produced the detached state of mind which normally follows only upon completed effort. By a trick of circumstance my impressions were being translated—even in the moment of their experience—into the phantasms which are all we can ever recall of past pain or pleasure.

No doubt the fact that every overtaxed faculty could now rest, except a single determination to keep going, helped this curious alchemy. For the mechanical rhythm of simple walking—soothing by contrast with that which had gone before—helped to hasten a process of mutation that should have waited for

the after-time of rest. It kept beguiling my realization of all that I still saw and felt, gently and continuously, out of the current of passing incidents into the passive backwater of their recollection. In this tranquil pool of remembrance we are accustomed, afterwards, to review the reflected impressions of our great days ; but not usually until an interruption of sleep or of time has separated us a little from the rough course of our experiences, and made of them unruffled reminiscences, and of us only interested visitors to our pool. Very rarely can we accompany our impressions round all the secret eddies of their passage from actual happenings into picture memories. When we seem to ourselves to have done so, as happened to me on that night-walk from the Nesthorn, these memories retain the power to return to us as moments not of a past but of the present hour ; and to return, not to our later and altered selves, but to us as we were then.

CHAPTER X

SUSPENSE AND COLOUR

In this short span
between my finger-tips on the smooth edge
and these tense feet cramped to the crystal ledge
I hold the life of man.

In these two eyes
that search the splendour of the earth, and seek
the light-born mysteries on plain and peak,
all vision wakes and dies.

IT is the uncertainty of its result which makes an adventure attractive. The feeling of suspense, so long as we are free to take action to end it, adds zest. Only when we are forced to remain inactive during our suspense does the feeling become disagreeable. And when a feeling is recognized as disagreeable it ceases to be profitable to us, because definite feelings of pain, or of pleasure, grow commonplace with their repetition or their persistence, and so lose their power to stimulate us.

But the feeling of suspense, so long as we ourselves are free to take action to end it, belongs to an order of neutral emotions which are not only fascinating in themselves, but which remain provocative of fresh enterprise. Our sensation, for instance, at the sound of good music, at the sight of big waves, or at the start of a fateful voyage, is undetermined, but exciting. We cannot be sure whether it is pain or pleasure that we are experiencing, in their accepted sense. We remain for its duration in a condition of enlivening suspense.

Of course it is in our nature, and in the nature of the provocative emotion we are experiencing, that we should feel driven to put an end to these uncertainties as they occur. The suspense may be of a kind that calls for bodily action on our part, to prevent it from defining itself as pain to ourselves in the issue. Or, again, it may be the ambiguous emotion produced in us by a sight or a sound of neutral character; when we shall feel no less compelled to make the effort designed to turn its effect

upon us definitely to our advantage, that is, to determine it as a feeling of pleasure in ourselves. By so doing, indeed, by terminating our period of suspense physically or by determining it mentally, we shall put an end to the stimulus which it had for us so long as it remained an unresolved uncertainty. But its provocative purpose will have been sufficiently served. Our moments of suspense will have incited us successfully to action, of the limbs or of the mind, urged us further along the path of new adventure, towards new and attractive uncertainties.

Mountaineering is rich in a type of suspense not easily definable as a pleasurable sensation, nor yet always certainly terminable by action to our advantage,—and therefore the more enduringly stimulating. As one example—for every class of mountaineer a corresponding grade of peak can provide some degree of uncertainty in its overcoming. In like manner, as we improve in skill, we have only to seek increasingly difficult ways of ascent, in order to be able always to renew our wholesome diffidence, to multiply the occasions for undefined impression, and to prolong our periods of stimulating doubt. To have attained a summit too readily, is to have neglected most of its opportunity. We shall have sacrificed for one instant of brief-lived gratification the countless possibilities that might have lived on for us, undetermined and enticing, in its less certain emprise.

Not that we should have deigned to pursue consciously such an abstraction as 'suspense' in our active years: a tangible mountain was then what we set out each day to climb. But, when we look back, we are tempted to search for some motive or feature that may be common to all our clearest memories. And we find then that it is our moments of uncertainty as to the issue of some event, or again the moments when we were experiencing feelings inexplicable as ordinary pleasure or pain, which return most constantly to mind, and which seem to have contributed most towards keeping the allure of climbing always new.

The more common type of suspense was the sensation we experienced during times of doubt as to the issue of some active incident. I believe that these moments impressed us exceptionally because, for their duration, the *timing* of the action of a scene was altered. Our suspense might retard or it might hurry the movement, as in a film: never could it leave the current of incident or of feeling normal. Consequently we received the impressions exceptionally at the time; and we remember them afterwards with abnormal clearness. In this way the single

recollection of our hesitation in the face of some dubious passage can re-create for us the whole atmosphere of one past climbing day. The recall of a fateful indecision as to the route, or our anxiety as to the measure of daylight still left to us, colours all the happenings of another.

The times when we were conscious of experiencing what I have called a neutral emotion, some state of feeling neither to be classed as enjoyment nor as its opposite, were less frequent ; but perhaps even more tenacious as memories. Probably the picture-scenes to which we mountaineers return most often, and which can reawaken in any later year all our pristine unsatisfiable longing for the hills, are those of our alpine starts before dawn, up the cold greyness of the first glaciers, with the last stars paling above the suspended life of the white peaks. Why are these nocturnes so deeply etched ? Our feeling at the time was certainly neither definite pleasure nor its opposite. It was neutral, undefined ; and therefore memorable. For at these moments we were free of all but one small certainty, that of our unfulfilled purpose for the day ; and we were fresh to feel the long suspense of the whole doubtful day before us quivering in the spellbound silence, quivering in every raw particle of our expectant energy, and inciting our eager hopes and fears to a very fever of impatient uncertainty.

If this be a true explanation, it may give us also the reason why a number of mountain ascents seem to lose their brilliance in recollection. They were too successful, too swiftly satisfying at the moment. Their uncertainty faded too early, or their moments of suspense were too lightly resolved.

The new ascent of the Zinal Rothhorn from the west ought, for example, to have had every mountaineering claim to remembrance. For the attempt was based, without reconnoitring, upon a flattering chain of reasoning. We found one day that an unusual coating of hard snow enabled us to scamper about over the unchancy slabs of the west face of the Dent Blanche. We reminded ourselves that the west face of the Rothhorn had remained unclimbed by reason of a similar slope of slab ; and we argued that the same aspect and structure should be susceptible of the same snow condition. A few days later, accordingly, we crossed the Trifhorn from Zermatt, ran down the snow dunes to the western base of the Rothhorn, and found our prediction triumphantly vindicated :—there above us shone a gleaming wall of hard snow, mounting from bergschrund to summit ridge.

But of all the easy gratification of that ascent only two

moments survive : and they were intrusions of suspense foreign to the smooth progress of the climb. As we chatted and chipped our steps steeply up the immense snow curtain, a sound startled us, the sibilant hoot of a stone spinning over our heads. Some thousands of feet above a midget party could just be distinguished upon the rocky skyline, the ordinary way of ascent from Zermatt. We shouted ; but at the same instant another fragment appeared, rocketing and wheezing down the centre of the white wall, straight for our zigzag of steps. We watched it, and watched it. It took an hour of suspense to fall ; and leap by leap every tract of the featureless snow-slope over which it descended is printed upon memory, in a succession of instantaneous pictures which survive only because they made a background for the duration of the rock menace. It missed us, and the moving pictures end.

As a matter of fact a small astute pilot-fish of a pebble, no larger than a button, did hit Josef on the hat, flatly, stunning him so that I had for a time to hold him up in his steps. But the suspense was by then ended ; and even that incident would probably have been forgotten had it not suggested a more lingering speculation as to how so small a stone could smite so hard a blow without breaking the skin.

A second little flashlight of suspense has picked out for remembrance a chance impression of the finish of our snow wall :—although there must have been much of greater interest at the time in our intervening flight up the precipitous slabs. We had reached the foot of a rock outcrop not far below the summit ridge. From a step on the steep ice-collar that surrounded the rock Josef had climbed on to it, and glad of the pleasant change to good holds and arm-work I started the machinery for a swing-up.

Possibly my muscles were stiffened, or the mere easiness of the movement encouraged my attention to wander before I had seen it through. Anyhow, as my feet reached the sloping shelf, and I was straightening up into balance—I realized agonizingly that I was short of momentum. With infinite slowness I began to sway backward again over the edge. The suspense seemed endless. I had time, first, to notice that Josef was moving and not looking back—it was a very insignificant passage ; to picture him jerked from his holds, both of us falling and dragging Marcus Heywood from his ice-steps below ; and to imagine all that would be conjectured afterwards about wrong reasons for the accident. Then, or perhaps simultaneously, came a flush

of anger with myself : this was the first blunder I could recollect making, and I had been trapped into it on a most unworthy passage of rock. Then, a rush of resentment with fate, which had staged the blunder at a place and in a moment when it would not be expected, and when, therefore, it could not be retrieved by the precautions usual in our combined climbing :—all this, in a single scorching sight of the arena of ice and rock about and above us, which seared every detail indelibly upon the eyeballs of memory.

And then, for some equally trivial reason—possibly some excrescence under the downward pressure of a heel as I moved—the back-sway ended, and I balanced slowly forward again, erect. Whereupon the flaring of suspense died down, and the rest of the day's doings have passed into oblivion. But I may add that I never forgot the warning ; and although I was often afterwards beaten upon a mountain by what I could not climb, I do not think I ever again made an inattentive movement in climbing what I could.

The first ascent of the east face of the same Rothhorn might have left much to recall, for it was an exceptionally faultless and happy day. But for that very reason, as I think, I look back on it now as into a bright nebula, wherein all detail is lost. I have sometimes wondered why this has not become one of the more regular Zermatt ascents. It substitutes for the slight monotony of an ascent and descent of the Rothhorn by the same southern ridge an ambit through noble scenery, and includes the traverse of the red towers of the north arête, usually only to be enjoyed by descending upon Zinal. The approach which it makes for us to the mountain, across the low east shoulder in the dark hours, and over the undulating plateaux of the secluded Hohlicht glacier where the white recesses creep in and out among the brown bases of the cliffs under an overhang shadowing enormously against the sky, is as impressive as anything in the Pennines.

This overhang under the summit appeared to us certainly unclimbable : equally so the higher part of the great couloir leading up from the glacier to the overhang. But the telescope suggested some attractive uncertainties for our day. We could see a great sabre-slash of a cleft down the rock nose forming the north wall of the couloir. Could we reach the lower end of this cleft by a traverse out of the couloir ? And, if so, was the cleft itself climbable ?

Happily for our success, but disastrously for its recollection,

our uncertainty was only short-lived. We bestrode the Rothhorn and Hohlicht glaciers, engulfed ourselves in the great central couloir, and followed it upward, with reaches of step-cutting on its steep ice-shoot, until we were blocked by an overhead obstruction of grey rock. So far doubt had endured, and it has served to keep the mirror of detail clear. But then, a broad snow band joined the couloir from the left, by which we might if we liked have reached the conspicuous shoulder on the north-east arête; and we saw for certain that its continuation upon the right of the couloir, more faintly marked, would enable us to traverse out on to the profile of our intended rib, at just the right point to admit us to the lower end of the deep slash up the nose.

With a laughing certainty which has covered recollection like a uniform colour-wash we swarmed out of the couloir, and up the slash, and up the subsequent rugosities of the rib: until its sequence of forgotten incidents was interrupted by an uncompromising 'step.' An attempt to scale this step direct ended in our repulse, and in our re-descent from it with the help of a doubled rope. So we traversed off the rib and out to the right again, into an open slabby funnel; and zigzagged up snowy slabs, first to the right and then back to the left, until we found ourselves upon a slim horizontal spar of rock, the lower and retaining wall of a small glacier. The baby glacier impends from the cornice of 'le Blanc,' and our embryonic rock spine, had it ever grown up, might have been acknowledged as the true backbone between the Rothhorn and the Mominghorn. We followed it back to our left, turned directly up the steep east face of the peak again, and by way of some accommodating granite slabs came out on to the main north arête of the mountain under the ear-lobe of its second big tower, and twenty minutes distant from the summit.

But of all this last over-generous passage one picture-memory alone survives. Before we broke out into the west wind over the main north ridge, we paused to eat, standing upon snow-frosted ledges, and roped together. Over our heads and about us icicle-spears of a man's length fringed a cluster of shallow stoops and niches: icicles flashing wet in the sun with sea-pearl and chrysoprase, and snapping at our touch or in the brawling of the gusts. The red overhang of the east face boomed out above on the moving sky, and seemed to be moving with us outward and over the hollow plain of glacier. And then Donald Robertson began to recite sonorously a long roll of Æschylean

chorus. The chant blended with and echoed astonishingly the roar of the wind, the ice-clatter and the uneasiness of space.

We coiled up our rope on the summit that day ; and came down as free-companions. Possibly the absence of the rope on the descent may account for my recollecting a dim revival of suspense where we turned down the west wall on very faulty ice steps, and in the teeth of the gale. But the rest of our doings remain only rattle and vague pleasure and—the unicoloured mist.

Face-climbs in the Alps had for me, and may for others still retain, more of this charm of uncertainty than ascents by the more obvious ridges. A part of this they owed to the fact that they remained unclimbed, and therefore un-ascertained, to a later period ; a part to their supposed uncertain temper, to their spasmodic fashion of defence by rock-avalanche and stone-discharge. In our effort, therefore, to restore the romance of adventure, to prolong doubt and defeat the local cocksureness of the guide who knew his Alps, and in whose sophisticated mind the details of familiar climbs were all salted down and labelled with “ Here I haul the Herr ” and “ Here I haul him harder,” face-climbs played a leading conspirator’s part. Their uncertainties and traditional insecurity helped us to readorn the ascents of historic Pennine peaks with something of an earlier glitter of pomp and circumstance.

It was Giraldus Cambrensis who first remarked—“ It is wonderful that when, after diligent search, all the stones have been removed from the mountains, and no more can be found, a few days after they reappear in greater quantities to those who seek them.” Giraldus’s experience of this discomfort will be confirmed by anyone who has slept out on a mountain side, and whose nature has not been hardened to the point of boasting with Goldsmith’s Traveller that he finds where

—the rocky summits frown
These rocks, by custom, turn to beds of down.

But when we come to climb such mountains, since we cannot even attempt to “ remove all the stones ” as a precaution, we have to learn a new science of their fashion of falling and make a new art of our manner of evading them.

In these ways face-climbs opened before us a fair field of study and experiment. There are, of course, good rock faces and bad rock faces ; but nearly every face has its sound points

and salient ribs free from the defects of its general character. It remains for us to distinguish these 'safeties.' Now a rock face seen from in front looks evenly 'exposed' all over; and a side view of it is as often misleading, revealing nothing but the general angle, and suggesting a false rib with every new profile as we shift. But the stones themselves prefer to fall down the real depressions. They can be trusted to betray the true modelling. The more pronounced the stone-fall, the easier it will be for the seeing eye to trace the real ribs and wrinkles. There remains, indeed, a less locatable risk from flanking fire, from rocks which burst and scatter as they strike. But this is a peril incidental also to many classic 'ridge' climbs. Such cross-fire is in any case short, and the dominant lines of the slope may be trusted soon to regulate the traffic within its proper channels again. The very steepness of rock precipices is also our protection. A slight projection makes cover for a considerable distance below it; and often the angle of a cliff of itself bars all but very fancy 'drop' shots. The single stealthy block which stalks us at noonday is of course an importunist common to all types of ascent.

Face-climbs, further, have the merit of offering us lateral escapes on to alternative lines. It is true that we would rather not be driven to cross exposed couloirs on faces, just as we would rather not walk upon corniced ridges or drive over the toes of policemen at street crossings. But the risks involved in all these three instances are at least localized and quickly passed. Their short interference concentrates for us within almost negligible compass the terrors of incalculable laws of motion such as were never intended for the purposes for which we break them. Foresight, caution, and above all pace, are a rule of three which can solve the problems of fractions which fall upon faces as surely as those of the squared roots—or boots—of gendarmes standing upon ridges, or upon point-duty.

A new ascent of the Rimpfischhorn from the east was one of the face-climbs undertaken in this spirit; with the double intention of finding a worthy way up a dignified but somewhat hackneyed peak, and of clearing the character of its less-visited rock aspect. We crossed the Adler pass, and circled round the foot of the black precipices, to a point a little north-east of the summit. An inquisitive sun sharpened the features of the face, and discovered to our reconnaissance a blunt, abrupt rib. It rests upon a broad band of snow which crosses the cliffs some two hundred feet above their base, and it forms the northern

wall of a depression which is marked at half its height by a yawning ice-toothed cave. If any line was to be found free of stone-hap up the exceedingly steep face, we decided that it must lie upon this rib.

Some overhanging crags sheltered us in the start of our race with sunshine, already at its agitating work above. One dawdling block did pass within hail ; and its deliberate excursion and alarum played a useful part. For I owe to it my one vivid memory of the whole look of that wall :—a wide front of sombre and unstable precipice, steepening below over the snows of pass and glacier, steepening above into a harrow of white-pronged pinnacles, clogged with wind-snow out of a cold blue sky. How unpleasant these solitary stone-threats seemed at the time ! And yet how much memory owes to them, in the deep etching of every line and form which chanced upon sight during the suspense of their passage. Moments which threaten extinction, like moments of creation, possess the power of intensifying our consciousness, of heightening the quality of our instants of living, and unforgettably.

We crossed the snow band ; and the neighbourliness of the couloir helped us, after one false start, to a lodgment upon the butt of the chosen rib. Its rock had seen better days, and the holds were fractious and secretive. I surveyed our leader's quarrels with it, sheer and far above my head, for a length of doubt that has guarded the scene—even the words of his unconsidered speech. Some few hundred feet higher the angle and the testiness of the rock abated ; and our hope drew breath. And again a few hundred feet, and the whole face of the rocks smiled : the smile widening out into a broad ' breakfast ' platform, and a boss of yellow rock, at the foot of a benign couloir. Thereafter assured success flooded in about us ; and it has washed out all features from our ascent of the iced couloir, and from that of the upright rock chimney which smuggled us out through the cornice on to the snow-capped main ridge, a few blustering minutes north of the highest point.

Two pictures from those last few minutes on the ridge stand out more clearly. One, a vignette of two of us, embracing each a spiked snowy prong upon the frosted crest ; while the man between us danced angrily in the air upon the tight rope, and the small cornice that had betrayed him splurged and grumbled down the emptiness of the great east wall under our feet. And the other, of our short-roped party, as we swung off the mountain, down the insufferable glare of the long glacier. Monotony

and the heat soon reduced me to the usual snow-plodding automaton. Suddenly a small snow crack or crevice revealed itself behind the heels of the man in front of me. Instinct warned me that my stride would take my foot exactly into, and not over it. On such mechanical trudges to break step is exasperating. To shorten step I knew must jerk the man in front and myself; to lengthen it or jump must jerk the man behind, and likewise myself. Whole dark ages seemed to pass, of suspense and indecision. Time ceased. The white glare whelmed in about me, maddeningly, unendingly. The men behind and in front waxed, in my consciousness of them, to immensities of hatefulness. The awful instant of passage arrived. My foot began to move out despairingly over all space. Some slight muscular adjustment—probably the extension of a leg-muscle, but magnified in feeling to a cosmic convulsion—syncopated the rhythm of the universe:—and the picture ends, and with it all the rest of the day.

The first ascent of the south face of the Dom was undertaken in a like quixotic spirit.¹ As I noted at the time—‘it was desirable that one at least of its aspects should be discharged without a stone upon its character.’ There was a further reason. The twin pyramidal faces of the Dom and the Täschhorn challenge the view from Zermatt in an indissociable kinship of height. The face of the Täschhorn had given us, as is told elsewhere, more than enough of grim and memorable suspense. To have neglected the defiance of its yet loftier brother, the Dom, might have introduced a discordant note between them, and have missed for ourselves what in a more chivalrous age would have been termed a very gentle opportunity for advancement.

Josef Knubel was once again handicapped by an injury to his knee, not acquired in the way of climbing but as the result of some impatience with a tin of raspberry-jam on the Weisshorn. *Hinc illi Lochrimatteri!*—for Gabriel Lochmatter came in his place, with Robin Mayor and myself. To reach the Dom hut consumed all our impatience. It is impossible upon sunbaked westward slopes at evening to keep the mounting shadow of heights behind us always between us and the sun. Some unthinking pass is sure to let a leak of hot rays through upon our back, and usually on the most treeless zigzags. As some solace, in the hut, we had the starlight, and the straw, to ourselves.

The ascent contented itself, humorously, with contradicting

¹ *Illus.*, facing p. 276.

in every point of angle, difficulty and sensation the expectations grounded upon our memory of the corresponding precipice of the Täschhorn. We put on the rope prematurely, in order to try to recall the highest of Swiss peaks to some sense of its family dignity. But the very core of the southern face could never even rise—or sink—to the distinction of a recognizable central couloir; its best effort seeming no more than a neutral depression between bumptious intrusions of rock from the western and southern ridges of the mountain.

We skirted up the depression, following a trimmed and tidy necklet of ridge depending from near the Domjoch. The neck bridled, arched itself off the face, and shook a mane of loose pinnacles. Whereupon we slid off it on the left; and again skirted up the sloping strata of the central scoop; until this opened out into a great rough-backed amphitheatre, the cloaca maxima of a number of higher gullies. This was our one cautionary section. The mouth of the gullies gaped above us with the possibility of falling stones: and we must remain exposed to their chance until we could reach the lower end of one of the ribs dividing the gullies.

We collected our breath, and took the danger-zone at a hand and foot gallop. The end of the most prominent rib, descending in a line with the summit, met us on the bound; and we skimmed up its corrugations into safety, to our first halt, and to breakfast. For on principle, and on such sunswept stone-slopes, I had hitherto negatived all suggestions of a pause. But now we were well ahead of time, and free from all external risks. We could eat, and enjoy at leisure, framed in the supreme height of the enclosing walls, our view of the opposite snows of the Täschhorn shuddering bleakly in the first chill of morning light, and of the Rimpfischhorn as it towered in frosty isolation over the nearer chequered curve of the Domjoch and revelled in its unusual divorce from the virtuous commonplaceness of the Strahlhorn.

On a day which soon became the hottest in an exceptional year, on a dry rock which courted our hands and feet with frim and fulsome holds, we were almost compelled to invent a new interest for the final rib. The two sky-ridges were now racing in upon us from either hand, clashing above our heads into the apex of the great pyramid. It became a point of honour with us to keep to the exact centre of the face, to arrive precisely upon the summit. The formality imposed upon us some intensified gymnastics up the last overhanging and dissolute red crags. Where the meeting of the two snow crests above the rock precipice

jettied a little confusingly at the last, our solemnity declined to move until Gabriel, pulling himself up tentatively here and there and peeping over the edge, was able to assure us that our bearing upon the final snow cone was absolutely true. Then we issued, gravely, in a state entry upon the summit.

Of several sights of the impeccable panorama from the Dom I have never succeeded in remembering anything but the little dollops of unlovely cloud, flat-bottomed, fuzzy-topped and dingy, which seem invariably to smudge the low modelling of the bird's-eye ranges. But the descent that day! The Festi glacier was under some burning-glass of sun haze. Its white heat seethed and smoked about us: and we stewed and suffocated, dry-shrivelled within and steaming without. Faster and faster we fled down, over snow and track, goaded by new blasts of the fiery heat. It took me two hours and thirty-five minutes to escape from the top to the door of the Randa bathroom; and I noted the fact because of the coincidence that exactly the same length of time was recorded for our passage through its consolations to the tea-table.

Knubel had always a prejudice against climbing the Breithorn. It is a patrician peak as it stares haughtily down the Zermatt valley from under its Cæsarean wreath of white laurel; but it has a plebeian backstairway of snow which makes a crowded thoroughfare of its stooping shoulders and bald crown. Up the north face suggested itself as the only worthy approach; and yet the one route known upon it—that by the Triftje ridge—was swept by occasional ice-avalanches. Knubel shuddered again at the thought of having the word 'Breithorn' inscribed upon his monument. In a happy moment I called his attention to the eastern end of the long serrated summit ridge, from which descends yet another rib, the Klein Triftje. It is a reticulated high-stepping ridge of most alpine promise, subtended by ice-cliffs and vanishing above upon the fan-face of a great belfry-tower of rock and ice. By starting from the Gandegg hut on the Thèodule, and crossing the base of the Triftje rib on to the pleasant glacial terraces of the north face, we could clearly reach, almost without loss of height, the springing start of the Klein Triftje rocks.¹

With Mayor, Robertson and a porter we made the adventure. We crossed the Triftje by an easy descending chimney, raced along the glacier plateau, mounted the start of our rib and were welcoming the steepness of its first few hundred feet,—

¹ Illus., facing p. 112.

when a valley snow-storm emptied its darkness over us, and worried us back to the Gandegg.

The postponement was intriguing : it made for uncertainty. We returned next day all the more keenly and rejoined the ridge, using the ice-steps by which we had been forced to leave it the day before. It set us to work at once, upon a narrow rising snow-crest mottled with ice. When we grew tired of step-cutting and of nice balancing upon it, it made horns of rock at us, and then discovered crimp little upward traverses, by which to turn the horns. I had hopes that the most noticeable barrier upon the ridge, a pugnacious stack of rock, might live up to its distant promise. It gave us a stimulating scramble, but no memorable check. The recording light of uncertainty only began to play about us again where the last, almost upright, edge of snow frilled out against the fan-face of the belfry tower above us. A direct ascent of the belfry wall looked hopeless. We drove our axes into the vanishing point of snow, and watched Josef traverse out to the right across the face, scraping toe-holds upon gleening slabs. He made three precarious attempts upon an ugly cold-shoulder of a corner, before he could force his way up over it, and pack himself into a glazed crack. The crack was almost as unsociable as the corner ; but it acknowledged a remote connexion with the main ridge, which we could now see tossing a brilliant ice-crest against the sky above our heads.

For another reason my recollection of this passage is not as distinct as our moments of doubt should have made it. In a later year, during a troublesome descent of the great Moine ridge of the Aiguille Verte, I had to watch, with all the responsible anxiety of last man, a magnified repetition of the same manœuvres : a skirmish of Josef's across a sun-treacherous traverse, and up an ice-boltered corner. The ice-glaze, globular and sweltering, which covered the precipitous slabs was in that indescribable condition when not only does it offer no hold, but boasts to the eye that by no ingenuity of axe or attachment can any safe hold be fashioned upon it. My feelings, as it happened, upon these two occasions were so alike that their resemblance has confused the details of the similar feats which evoked them.

The overhang of the Breithorn crack nodded us cavalierly up to the brilliant cornice ; and the cornice bowed us stiffly on to the crest of the main ridge. This easterly prolongation of the Breithorn summit is all admirable rock and firmly modulated crests of snow. There is nothing better in the district ; and it is, or used to be, all too seldom visited. We spread

ourselves over its varied support ; and passed for the time into the cloud of confident pleasurable action which leaves so indefinite a memory.

But on the final snow spine up to the summit a more real and very thick white mist crept down to envelop us, and framed an enduring shadow-picture. Snow-footing and mist-wrap were all one and the same white opacity, indistinguishable from each other. Josef, a formless darkening of mist just above me, was moving upwards through a lighter obscurity, flogging with single swings of his axe foot-holds of whitish vapour upon the denser edge of vapour between his feet. In such an envelope, uniform and featureless, we can feel no certainty whether we are going up or down, standing erect or toppling over. The uncertainty produces suspense, of an unusual kind. And the more unreal Josef looked, a wraith gesturing in white fog, the more intently I had to watch and follow him ; until the grey-white nothingness under his feet no longer seemed to arrest the swing-through of his axe, and we discovered by the absence of touch in the mist ahead that we were standing upon the clouded summit.

Of the dull snow descent that always un-distinguishes the backstairs of the Breithorn I should have kept no memory, but for a brighter impression of it, borrowed from a later year. Not long before the war, with Laurence and Eleanor Slingsby, a party whose united ages about equalled my own, we had walked up the October loveliness of the Zermatt valley, watching almost hour by hour the last breadths of its summer mourning softening with all the colours of the first night frosts. On the next day we turned off the Thèodule up the new snow of the Breithorn, for no other reason, I think, than to prolong that unsurpassable view of the Matterhorn. The mountains lay under white sunlight, and in a windless wintry cold so secret and severe that we had already spent two evening hours in the hut restoring life to Laurence's frost-nipped fingers. Upon those endless Breithorn slopes the affliction returned ; and there is no boredom like the boredom of unrelieved snowfields. We dawdled, and looked at the Matterhorn ; and then crawled, and looked back at it longer. Finally, half an hour from the top, we turned round with one consent, and fled heartily to the valley.

The autumn foliage of trees flooded up to meet us. The warmth of it, dividing like a miracle, for our exodus, the white seas of snow and ice, linked the promised land of Italy to our

coloured memory of the Swiss forests. Among the vines and creepers of Valtournanche that night the peasants, with the sociability which revisits them in the fall, made festa for us, with dancing and music and tinted lamps under the trellises. Was it the contrast of these valley colours, on this side and on that isolating our white desert hours upon the Breithorn, which has kept that last picture of the mountain so distinct? Or because its image stands upon the edge of the long shadow of war-suspense which followed so soon?

From that day, as from a milestone set between the years, the fairway of memory travels backward into the past. From it again the way winds forward—to the turning that ended for one of us three so swiftly in deeper shadow, and for the other two began again under such unlooked-for sunshine.

Suspense I have suggested may have much to say in the selection of pictures for our gallery of memory. But at least when our interludes of fear or of doubt are in question we ourselves can exercise some indirect supervision of their action as our collecting-agents. Our nerves are our own. It is for us to control them more or less; and in this way we can secure that the moments they select to perpetuate shall at least have had some importance for ourselves at the time.

But there is another and very independent category of impressions, an agency which is as active in adding to our collection, and that is Colour,—the accident of colour in objects we see great or small, the lighting of a scene in general or in detail.

Now over colour we have no control; it is solely of nature's contriving; and it all too often takes advantage of its independence to give permanence to the most trivial sights or seconds regardless of any preference or discretion of our own. We all know how irresponsibly it may act in any attempt we make to recover our earliest childish memories. Of most of our infancy we can never re-create more than an external or spectator's point of view. We can reproduce portraits of ourselves in certain remembered surroundings; but we cannot return *into* ourselves, inside our personalities as we were then; for the reason that with every widening of our horizon we have replaced something of an old self with something of a new.

But we all know, also, how a chance reminder of a particular colour, or touch or smell, may serve if only for one instant of time to re-identify us with the inside reality of some forgotten stage in our lives. I remember that as very small boys a younger

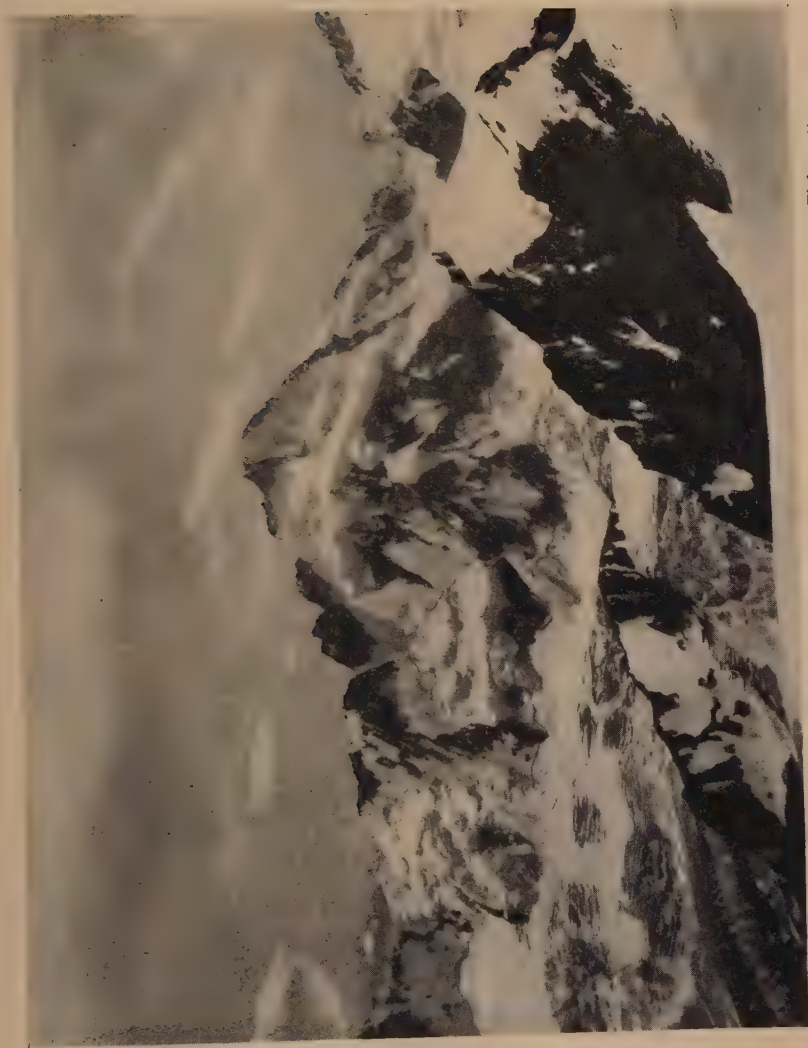
brother and I were allowed to paint a garden seat, with large and dripping brushes. At some point it seemed to us a matter of greater moment to paint each other, gravely and amply. The sheen of thick wet gloss upon glowing terra-cotta paint, as I saw it then upon his curls and smock-frock, rounded off into an entirely memorable sensation by the smell and the stiff touch of the same colour upon my own face, has kept the power, whenever I see it again, of putting me back in mind and feeling inside my whole sentient and satisfied self of that period. Through no other remembered experience can I resume my whole feeling and thinking self, within and without, so far back in time.

It is said that few of us can dream colours; and perhaps this is why so many of us find the colourless chiaroscuro of high Alps the most suitable material for our mature day-dreaming. But all the more violently does our masterless collecting-agency of memory pounce upon and cling to the unexpected notes of colour or lighting which nature may arbitrarily discover to us among our hills. A green tuft of pine through the remains of a winter avalanche, the aquamarine thumb-marks on a crevasse-wall, the last rim of fire between darkness and snow at sunset, the crimson scarf of a workman passing us on the glacier path, or that most constant relief, the chromatic blues of water changing within their encirclement of ice or snow or across their rock reflections,—these are accidents of colour which stay with us, sometimes detached from any context, sometimes as magic clues which can lead us back over forgotten tracks of experience, into lost phases of personality.

To the colour of one glacial pool I owe the memory of one of the brightest of long alpine days, and the recall of a whole year of myself as I was.

The ascent of the north-west face of the Dent d'Hérens was designed as a new approach for an impressive peak. That our way proved only to be new in part detracted nothing from our pleasure in it at the time, and added to it afterwards: since a good thing only gains from multiplied appreciation of the right kind. The Schönbühl hut above the Z'Mutt glacier had just been formally opened by Edward Whymper—whose characteristic remark upon the occasion was still in our ears—and it offered us a more sheltered base than the rather jaded hollow upon the Stockje rocks.

The crevasses of the Tiefenmatten glacier were enjoying a close season; and we were jealous not to disturb them, flitting through them in the dark hours on light and early feet. Above



Tiefennatten

DENT D'HÉRENS

Col Tournanche

us, upon our face of the Dent d'Hérens, the wrinkled bolsters of ice and snow, heaped high one upon the other up the triangular wall, had been smoothed out for us by the hand of a kindly summer. We wheeled straight up the central ice of the wall; and then, instead of bearing away to the right on to the accessible west ridge, the line followed as we learned later by our predecessors, we yielded to the direct temptation of the broken ice-cliffs above us.

Spits and ladders and corridors of ideal snow conspired to help us on, and prevented our spells of step-cutting upon the cliffs from ever becoming earnest. The last ice barrier, a moat and wall rent and raised across the steep white face from ridge to ridge, gave away its own terrors even before we had had time to feel them. In the morning sun-blaze the moat or schrund flashed before our eyes its one and only bridge, a single and gigantic icicle, all but 'perpendicular,' which spanned both chasm and wall from indrawn lower to pouting upper ice-lip. Solid and semi-transparent, a pillar of green rock-salt, it was a column made for the display of showy and safe ice-work. In turn we embraced it, and by nick-steps and finger-notches swarmed up it. Snow spit and snow slope, steadily accelerating, piled themselves upward under our feet as we climbed; until we paused upon the junction of the west and north-west ridges, to take breath for the short ridge-run to the summit.

Hill climbers may be, not unfairly, described as people who expend much energy in going somewhere, in order to look therefrom at something else. The privileged view of the Matterhorn to which it admits us should certainly justify many ascents of the often difficult and sometimes dangerous Dent d'Hérens. The Matterhorn is always the Matterhorn, massive and stable to the eye. But as we see it from here,—and there is nothing else in the picture—its mass soars into the sky above us with an inexpressible lightness. It seems to be borne upon air, balanced upon its structural lines, as upon wings.¹ This effect is principally due to the profile line of the northern or Z'Mutt ridge, as we see it upon our left lifting against the sky. In two smooth gigantic curves this ridge springs from the glacier in support, and bears aloft the spire of the summit; and its two ascending curves, joined like outspread pinions, are tilted to resemble the flight of a bird as it slants in a swinging turn across the wind.

We were using ice-claws, and they served us well on the giant strides of the descent. For from the summit we literally

¹ Illus., facing p. 116.

leaped, in long bounds. The afternoon snow had softened to that fine consistency which accepts and steadies the forward drive of a straight leg, and yet springs it again into the air behind us with the resilience of india-rubber. The rope was no impediment; because Josef and I cantered in freedom at either end, and Marcus Heywood was young and long-legged enough to have his protests in the uncomfortable middle-distance disregarded. We cascaded harmoniously down the big icicle, skated the passages of ice-steps in combined figures, and were laughing ourselves back into breath upon the Tiefenmatten plateau in less than thirty minutes from the summit.

Uncertainty there may have been; stone suspense and incidence there certainly was, as we ran the usual risks down the Tiefenmatten icefalls. But neither conservative medium has succeeded in salving any details out of "the glory of speed and the glow."

All that I remember I owe to the presence of a small turquoise ice-pool below the Stockje promontory. At one end of it the shelving glacier slid in under the ripples, on a gradual incline of ice soft and silver-cruised to the feet. And to and fro along this, in sunlight and the after-glow of our torrid descent, we raced for an hour, perhaps more, in a rivalry of flying headers that reflected their own joy of motion upon a surface rapturously cold, serenely blue. More and more in retrospect the sky-colour of the pool has crept upon the panorama of the day, flooding over the drabness of the Z'Mutt glacier, rising upon the lines of cliff and buttress, invading like a spring tide even the higher ice-bays and the black, squared precipices of the Dent d'Hérens itself. Until the whole climb has become merely an overture to the bathe; and I could almost think that we plunged headlong from the parching and snowy island-summit into an ocean of refreshing blue light.

Water, its many shades of interrupting colour, has stolen as many minutes of recollection out of the oblivion waiting for our care-free days, days of too little event or of too unrelieved a success. Of a devious and perhaps original variant up the westerly flank of the Blümlisalphorn, not a toilsome yard would have been remembered, but for one downward view which it gave us of the Oeschinensee. Set deeply, as in a crater, under its brows of cliff, the little circular lake stared up and past us at the contracted sky: a grey untroubled eye of the world, watching only to reflect the short greeting of sunlight or to borrow from darkness the transient gleaming of a star.

A fantasy of bottle-green ice, edged with olive crystals and still freezing in encrusted pillars of ice-drip on to the weathered cheek-bones of a snow-crowned buttress of rock, alone reminds me that I did once succeed in climbing the Mönch. And in the thought of it I can feel over again the purgatory of two days' confinement by a blizzard in the Bergli hut, and subsequently of our seven hours' trudge to the foot of the green-garnished buttress, along all the weariness of the Ewig Schneefeld. That day the firm was a vale of Siddim, a swamp of snow, with a crust on it that twisted each stumbling leg knee-deep, and then clung to it like a trap, with sharp dragging edges. For the fortitude of my companion, Arnold Lunn, to whose old mountain injury every one of the many thousand rasping paces must have meant a new and painful wrench demanding from him a separate effort of will, I can feel as wondering an admiration now as then.

Yet another contrivance of strange ice that day did much to remove an old prejudice. As we looked back from the Ober Mönchjoch I could see the gallery-openings of the much-abused Jungfrau railway pricked blackly here and there upon the enormous brindled walls of the Eiger, each tiny puncture brought to the eye by a tapestry of discoloured ice. Seen in this perspective the trespass lost its offence. A shift of rock imperceptible to the eye, a year or so's neglect to keep the work in repair, and every trace of it would be gone. The courage of it challenged sympathy, almost a fellow-feeling. How little the impertinence differed, upon consideration, from our own in forcing ourselves for a few hours upon the wilderness of these great mountains, and calling our ephemeral track a 'conquest.'

I have but to think again of that ice-pointing to the pin-pricks on the Eiger wall, to suffer the same change of feeling among our own hills. If I turn now and look down from a height upon the winding of some raw and objectionable roadway, it looks no longer so arrogant an intruder; it has no more importance than the curl of apple-rind which we chuck over a shoulder and glance at momentarily for its fanciful pattern. The cars, too, that seemed to magnify the trespass upon the view into an insult to three senses at once, diminish with the thought to tardy grubs, absurdly in pursuit of each other's tails. Their insignificance, their movement upon sufferance along a line without breadth, stir a kind of compassion. The passing of a minute—as hills measure time—and the white thread of road may be lost under wild growth upon the hillside; and with it the short trespass, human and mechanical, will have ended.

From dislike to disregard, and from disregard to a humorous appreciation are the steps we make as we shift our point of view with wider experience, and see sights or people or ideas, which once shocked us as inappropriate, in better proportion. In scenery, as in our opinions, we can never know what we shall finally like or dislike until we have moved far enough off, on our feet or in thought, to find for them exactly the right perspective, and to see them, and ourselves, as part of a longer view.

Of a winter ascent of the Tschingelhorn, with the same good companion and Claude Elliott as pilots, memory only begins to take notice where, as we sped downward on ski over the edge of the Tschingelfirn, the hunting-green of the Lauterbrünnen valley broke upward through the sameness of white glaciers and made a truant of every thought and of every alternate glance. And the lawless inroad of colour brings back with it still the ache I felt behind inexpert knees after the hours of rough and tumble down snow-crusts of adamant.

In like manner the image of a ski-crossing of the Furggjoch, when late spring snow drifted us down over planes of white samite right into Breuil, begins to live where I looked back once, and saw the unexpected colours that sunlight was gleaning behind us upon the silken and winding trails of our ski. And it becomes active where the snow ran out upon a meadow, and a rainbow dance of spring flowers raced up round us, and tripped our feet.

Of several ascents of the Aiguille d'Argentière I can revive most easily one we made—possibly for the first time in its entirety—up the whole ridge-crest from the col du Chardonnet. And that owes its liveliness to some fanciful oppositions of colour. In the beginning, there is the picture of the first great snow wall above the pass, illuminated by the rubicund face of the guide who lost his temper upon it. At the end, the vision of the final ice-cone is preserved as a background for a certain sombre and sinuous expressiveness in the coloration and curving of Maynard Keynes's back, as he swerved, like a short dark ray, up the ivory wall above me. Finally, I can recover much of the sensation of fatigue and responsibility produced in me on that ascent by long hours of step-cutting in the lead, not from any memory of the step-cutting in progress, but from the short intervals of rest when I stopped working. For then, balanced on one leg in a step, I could turn my head for instants from the close and dazzling wall, and my eyes rested upon the evergreen pinetops in the valley with a sense of physical relief so acute

that it can bring back with it a whole anthology of other feelings unconnected with it, and even the happenings they reflected.

A traverse of the neighbouring Aiguille du Chardonnet made a double bid for longer remembrance. Suspense the peak held over our heads throughout the day. For it threatened us with falling stones up most of the ascent by cliff and snow-chimney from the col du Chardonnet; and as we descended the solid-looking and steep rock flues of the northern wall, it threw earthenware slivers and plates after us with the open-handedness of an angry kitchenmaid. We only escaped from our own anxiety at the point where the rocks ended, above a wild and stormy steep of snow descending through maroon shadows on to the glacier du Tour. There we flung suspense and tradition to the winds, after the stones, left an over-cautious young guide to make his own slow ladder of descending steps, and ourselves spun in a riotous glissade down the whole height of the hollowing wall to the glacier.

Then the Chardonnet fell back upon colour as its second string. As we halted upon the col du Passon, it confronted us suddenly with the cloistral vista of the glacier d'Argentière, a frosted and clouded lake of ice, dipping to its long centre, and lifting the length of its smooth borders against the bases of the white meditative peaks enclosing it. And in the slanting afternoon sunlight the shadows of these Aiguilles were descending and marching upon the glacial surface in armies of colour, like the invading Persian host for multitude and variety: in wedges, in squares, in crescent and in column making the white perspective live with wheeling masses of shade, violet and lavender and amethyst and gentian purple and blue—all the inadequate names we have to give to such effects and interruptions of light. For all I know we never came away from the col du Passon. The shadowy armies captured the day; and they have kept it prisoner.

In another year we made quite a difficult business of an ascent of the Dent du Géant: because we sternly refused even to see the fixed ropes which degrade the huge up-ended slabs. Perhaps I refused to see too much, for the climb only secured three impressions. I can see, as we approached the rocks, the sharp lance-headed image of the Dent thrown by sunrise across the snow to our feet: so boldly and tangibly modelled in shadow that it seemed to rest in high relief upon the snow, of a colour of dark ripe damsons, running more unripely red at the edges where it met the sun-glare. Again, and these were moments

of suspense, I can re-enter very realistically into our struggles, as we successively fought our way up the famous V-cleft overhanging a mile of brown slab. It is the only place where the fixed rope has excuse; and we did look at it, as it tempted and impeded us there, but virtuously refrained in the end from using it. In the third memory, although its appearance is gone I can still feel the summit crag under my boots, because of what we saw from it. The Italian valleys were filled with their familiar swell and surf of cloud. And the sunlight had broken into the heart of the clouds, blowing them up into great bubbles of dull amber, each bubble with a whorl of darker gold inside it. The broken surf-edges and trailing wisps were charged with an incandescence that kept bursting their thinner mantle into flashes of yellow light, like the flaming of resin-dust puffed through candle-smoke. Into the shallower and inclined drifts of cloud lying far down upon the higher glaciers the sun's rays could not penetrate so luminously. The light was slipping over them fugitively, and they lay faintly a-glow between the harsh ridges and softer ridge-shadows: great petals of phosphorescent mist, of the colour and texture of early primroses as we see them in their rough setting between grey boulders and moss-green roots.

The comely Lötschenthaler Breithorn stands so satisfactorily, and is such a complete pleasure to look at, that the matter of climbing it—as in the case of several other Oberland peaks—seems altogether of small importance. But we must have done so, somehow and some time, because the view along the insecure steeples on the summit ridge stays an obstinate memory. They were top-heavy with snow, and webbed between with ice. So precariously did they project that I decided not to risk the crawl forward on to the last and reputedly highest. But I have a clear impression of those further knobbly and black talons of rock, splitting at the top joints out of their ill-fitting icy webbing. And I suppose the clearness to be due not only to my moments of doubt, but to the dark contrast which they made with the auburn beard of Sir William Ellis's guide, who was preceding us. He insisted upon fighting his way through, rather than along, the unsubstantial covering of the crest, to its last shred; and his bright beard burned refulgent, appearing to shrivel up the snow-frills as he embraced and struggled with them.

A like mystery envelops most of the story of our ascent of the south-eastern and rocky face of the Gabelhorn, which I made with Herbert V. Reade. I think we must have made

some mistake in our line upon the great buttress, for I have an impression of dire and dangerous manœuvres up snow-covered mantel-pieces, and of seeing a guided party pass us by on the other side, gloatingly. But reality begins where we stood on one horn of the summit, gazed longingly across at the other, and saw the 'gabel' between the two filled by its notorious dilemma, the tormented ice-crest of a double cornice. A double cornice is an ice-wave which starts to fall one way, recollects itself with an upward wriggle, and decides to fall the other way. As I looked across the broad sagging swirl of ice leaning far out over space between the horns with a fringe of huge icicles under its drooping chin, I was reminded of a nursery picture of Samson in the temple at Gaza, with his shoulders locked about the two central columns, stooping and straining dizzily to bring them crashing down with him. But as I looked a second time down the vertical height of blue and scaly ice serpentine ponderously upward between the rock stacks, it suggested another and quite a different picture: that of the illustration in *Alice in Wonderland* of the unlucky Bill the Lizard, as he shoots into the air out of the White Rabbit's chimney-stack. And against the impassable ice, and for all I know perpetuating its memory, is painted the colour of Herbert's felt hat, and of the scarf by which its broad brims were tied down under his chin.

It is possible that both upon the Lötschenthaler Breithorn and the Gabelhorn the irruption of uncertainty at a moment when the climbs seemed all but over may have helped the conservative action of the beard and of the coloured scarf. Certainly from yet one more guideless ascent of the Weisshorn, which I made with Herbert Reade, and upon which from first to last there was no such moment of doubt, not even the image of the hat survives. Moreover, of the elegant precision of my companion's climbing I was too often a spectator during the twenty years of our association, for any instances of it upon these particular ascents to have remained distinctive, and so to have helped towards recollection.

As with colour so with light: bright contrasts have picked out their own assortment of scenes remembered. A crossing which we made of the Aiguille du Tacul passes from shadow into shadow—through a few shining seconds just after Josef and I had left the top. For it happened that a cloud was whisking across the blunt edge of the arête below me, brushing with it over shadowy space frozen particles of snow-dust. And upon the blend of cloud and snow-speck there sparkled vivid shreds

of rainbow, coming and going enchantingly like lights at sea, and still recalling those few instants of our descent out of forgetfulness.

A second traverse of the Aiguille Verte has no less its rainbow for remembrance. While we were descending the Moine ridge in sunshine, a local snow-storm covered our view of the Grandes Jorasses at the head of the glacier; and upon it there took shape a quarter rainbow of most startling complexion. The snow or sleet falling through, or behind, this exuberant gem-like colouring had the artificiality of a stage storm helped out by limelights. Of this descent, a little lower down, I have yet another glimpse; but seen through a window of suspense. I knew that two friends, eminent mountaineers, were to have ascended the ridge on the day before our traverse. So I was on the look out for their tracks. We had not found them as we descended the higher portion. Then, peering down over the heads of the descending line of towers, I saw a line of steps winding up along the intricate white crest far below us. We moved on down; more of the tracks came into sight; and with a catch of the breath I saw that the tracks ended abruptly at a black gaping hole in the narrow crest. The snowy fish-back of the ridge was not solid: it was in part a cornice hollow underneath; and a square chunk of it had dropped through, like an oubliette. We said nothing; but I saw Josef, a hundred feet below me, stop, and gaze very intently. We moved down again. More of the narrow white ridge came into sight, still far underneath us; and Josef turned and grinned up at me:—the line of tracks had again become visible, continuing, and safely upon our side of the oubliette. The trap therefore must have fallen during the few hours that followed the passing of our friends and that preceded our arrival. Even so, the sight of the black gape was grim and unforgettable. For, innocent as that length of snow-crest looked, to us as to them, they had passed for the whole length of it over the vaulting of a cornice so rotten that portions of it were ready to drop through of their own weight.

To climb the Little Dru, and from it scale the arrogant higher monolith of the Great Dru has always seemed to me the right mountaineering way to make acquaintance with these two magnificent Aiguilles. Twice I was driven back, by weather and by an embarrassing condition of the Charpoua glacier. But when the favourable day came, the double event accomplished itself so smoothly that its legacy is reduced to two flashlight pictures. From the little to the larger Dru we make a zigzag

up a hopeless-looking wall ; and where this overhangs bombastically we squirm up over its steep left-hand profile, and continue to the top by a miraculous groove up the very outside edge of impossibility. The season had filled this groove for us with a troublesome, round-backed snake of ice. The groove is of surpassing steepness, and suspended over more space than is even usual. So also was the ice-snake within it, up which we had to climb. Its slippery back was grit-speckled and water-marked, and, like a snake, it shone dull green or bright blue in the sunlight as we moved upwards upon it. Close to my face the cold wet ice winked and blinked, confusingly, and slimed away from my feet. So that, and again all too like a snake, it seemed to be actually shifting and elongating as much under my grasp as to my eyes. It could never be easy to forget a climb up the glimmering back of a python in agitation. Again, of all our fatiguing descent that day of the precipices of the Great Dru, only one chimney with a particularly lowering and vacant expression comes back into mind. It was overhanging at the top : and since it fell to me to go down it last, I peered over into it with much concern, so as to make certain that there were really no holds on its gloomy walls. Every time I leaned over to look, a fractured corner of wet quartz upon the lower, opposite wall of the chimney blazed up into my eyes all the colours of a kaleidoscope. I could not dodge it : it never missed its dazzle. At last I shuffled a leg over the edge, screened off the unerring foot-light with my boot, and started down into vacancy upon trust alone. It must have served ; but with the quenching of the quartz-light the shadow returns upon the day.

Where colour is more varied in tone, and more general, as in the British hills, memory may have to wait more often upon these exaggerated contrasts, or upon some very conspicuous arrangement of light, for its trove of accidental pictures.

The jagged combs and rough-hewn corries of Skye I find return most clearly in glimpses ; wheresoever, as might always happen, it chanced that they were seen vividly for a moment between sun and storm, against the rainbow halos around our own cloud 'spectres,' or printed upon some veil of moving shadow under-run at its lower trailing edges by startling wind-lights off the sea.

Of many scores of crossings which I have made of the Welsh Glydyrs one alone stays undimmed : when upon a snow shoulder we watched spell-bound through the whole course of a mid-

winter sunset the rare phenomenon of the ' blood-red sword '— a single bar of crimson light, bent upon the sky behind Snowdon, and reaching in even breadth from sea to zenith.

Late on a rainy afternoon Humphrey Jones and I once climbed out upon the top of Tryfan ; and found ourselves looking out over a furrowed plain of cloud, which filled all the Nant Francon and sloped upwards against the higher summits of the Carneddls opposite. All this inclined surface was a turmoil of rainbow colours. Near at hand the curves and bands of the spectrum were brilliant and distinguishable. But as they continued ring beyond ring up the farther distance, the colouring became a chaos, subdued and broken tints melting upon each other in admired disorder over miles of tossing mist. Jones as a man of science tried to count and to record their number ; but they were the better remembered for their lovely confusion.

Yet another climb upon Tryfan emerges from the many we had upon its good cliffs because of the singular storm-lighting which intimidated us. I had for some time been sensible of the ordinary darkening of the landscape under a thunder cloud. But, when I looked round from my busy climbing again, this had changed to an uncanny and livid-green visibility, which was magnifying in unnatural colour and distinctness every detail upon the hillsides or in the valley-lengths lying under the electric pall. The corpse-lighting had a distressing nearness : it seemed to be a freak in my own eyes, as though I were looking at daylight under jaundiced lids or through tinted glasses. As the oppression of gloom overhead increased, descending and thickening foot by foot, the rugged spaces of hillside still showing beneath it appeared as if of themselves to be diffusing more and more of this lurid glare, altering, under growing obscurity, from ashen-green to sulphurous yellow, blotched like calcined copper. Shadow thickened upon shadow, lower and lower through the following minutes. Until, at last, the pall had sunk about us and beneath us on the face of the precipice ; and I was looking out and down into a crater of sooty eddies, penetrated deep below by an under-glow as of molten lava. A quick, close flicker of lightning, when it began, came only as a relief ; and we returned to normal unpleasantnesses, and lightened spirits, in a fierce squall of snow.

In high Alpine mountaineering much of every day is spent among the whiteness of snow and ice. And a white light either as a single reflection of sunshine or as general illumination might well have been expected, even more frequently than an occasional

strange colour, to have formed the clairvoyant disk, the crystal that preserved for our gazing the incidents of some past climb. But I can only think of one vigorous day, that of our crossing of the col Tournanche, which survives as an image seen in a circle of unbroken light, in the filmy whiteness of fresh snow, the semi-transparency and again the dull ivory of ice, the silver of glacial reflections.¹

Its whiteness indeed owed something to contrast. Out of the shadow of tragedy at Courmayeur we had driven up to Val-tournanche. Still with clouded minds we had walked on to Breuil; and in the dark hours, under a whisper of rain-mist, we wound over the wet meadows to the base of the unseen Matterhorn. We were well up under the cliffs of the Tête du Lion when the darkness, upon memory as upon the view, dispersed. An oblique, frosty sunrise carved out with a single sword-stroke the reality of the peaks about us; and upon their white mirror of new snow all the following course of the day shines clearly. Instantaneously the whole flashing height of the Matterhorn clanged into the sky above our heads, plated with metalline sheets of ice, with silvered flutings and giant pan-pipes of fantastic icicles. For a minute or so after the tearing of the mist veil the stillness remained unbroken, the armour of frost held proof against the blaze of the sun. Then there came a rustle from far overhead, and a shiver of falling; and another followed, and yet another, before the echoes had died away. Soon the vast mountain wall was tremulous with splintering shafts of light, and the air was trembling no less about our ears, as moonstone-shields and spears of steely ice began to flicker and crash like shattering glass down the southern precipices. The sight was enough to tell us that we should make no traverse of the Matterhorn that day; and more than enough, too, to console us for our loss by its sheer splendour.

We were, at the moment chosen for this apocalypse, engaged upon the delicate traverse in ice-steps round under the bulking cliffs of the Tête du Lion. It seemed a pity to turn our backs, before we must, upon the shining marvel of the peak. So I suggested that we might invent a line straight up the Lion crags above us, and only when we stood upon its head turn left-handed and follow the high skyline of snow back to the col Tournanche.

The col Tournanche is a real pass, with a personality. Many titular passes are not more than 'slacks' between adjacent mountains, dead-points from which the ridges ascending to

¹ Illus., facing p. 206.

the heights upon either hand have stolen all individual character so as to add to their own length and symmetry. Wherefore a high snow pass between two strutting peaks often retains for itself no more significance than the white handkerchief dropped as a mark between two duellists, whose opposing legs and feet, as they front one another across it, encroach even upon its edges and modest compass. But the Matterhorn and the Dent d'Hérens treat the col Tournanche with punctilious respect. They stand far back, upon their own dignity of rock bases ; so that the whole length of the beautiful snow curves between them belongs to the fall of the pass, not to their height. We feel instinctively that the mutual inclination of the ridges is leading our eye downward from either peak, to rest upon their white arc of union, the pass ; not upward, in the more usual tribute of ridges to their parent mountains.

The Tête du Lion began to imitate its great neighbour, and to pelt us as we balanced in our steps with clinking plates and ice-brash. So we stopped watching and wondering, and clambered straight up its unprepared south wall. Mallory overwhelmed the first little overhang with wave-like ease. His movement in climbing was entirely his own. It contradicted all theory. He would set his foot high against any angle of smooth surface, fold his shoulder to his knee, and flow upward and upright again on an impetuous curve. Whatever may have happened unseen the while between him and the cliff, in the way of holds or mutual adjustments, the look, and indeed the result, were always the same—a continuous undulating movement so rapid and so powerful that one felt the rock must either yield, or disintegrate. Hugh Pope came last. This was his first big alpine season. But as I watched throughout the day his familiar virtuosity upon rock surpassed by his mastery of complicated mountaineering, a former conviction strengthened, that his were a temperament, a skill and a physique that ought to produce the greatest amateur the mountains had yet seen. In such company I preferred the contemplative position and the subtle rhythm that can delight the middle-man on the rope, on a varied and difficult ridge.

We broke our way through the ice and rock entanglements on to the white sphinx head, and rested again to look at the great pyramid towering into sunshine above us. No simile can suggest the white radiance of that morning's Matterhorn : the thousand shapes and tones and shadows of whiteness which combined in its ascendant light. One would have to borrow

an image from music and compare it to the thousand instruments of a great orchestra, sounding together the crescendo of an unknown chord. Only to stand upon one shining point in space and look up at another can give us a feeling for which we can find no words. Three minutes of what we see and feel there are worth three years of life.

We turned westward along the miles of narrow snow-crest and followed our shadows now on this side and now on that of its descending and glittering edge. Mallory's axe twinkled and clicked, and the hard chips from the steps rustled continuously and harshly downward over the steep snow crust. Below us, upon whichever side we moved, the flawless white curve swept over into a mere feeling of depth. Beyond all depth, the white curve renewed itself, upon the level and lesser whiteness of the glaciers; and it returned upon our sight again almost blindingly from the mounting snow-walls of the opposite peaks. All too soon, for such a day, we dipped into the crescent of the pass. As we lay on the snow in its centre, the horns at either end of the silver arc cut off everything from me except the sky. A man riding between the horns of an old moon might not see the world very differently; nor could he feel a greater sense of height and of lonely illumination.

To the south, as I leaned over the rim, I gazed down with satisfaction upon the falling glaciers de Chérillon, whereon Josef and I had once spent two successive days of fog, and of struggles to reach this same pass. The glaciers had compassed us about with séracs of such nightmare difficulty that I doubted, afterwards, whether they had not been evil changelings of the mist. There, too, I had won a bottle of champagne from Josef, in a wager as to which of the glaciers we were really lost upon. That bottle also never gave proof of an existence separable from the fog.

On the north side of our moon, the planes of light poured downward, sliding and rounding one upon another much as the white plumage ruffles and resettles smoothly down the arched neck of a swan. They cascaded to the Tiefenmatten in a single span; and thence, in planes as white but less precipitate, to the Z'Mutt glacier. Over their hurrying brightness we were to make our more gradual descent.

The steep snow was firm, and we could use our feet for step-making as often as our axes. But the fluctuating white surface was shadowless and deceitful. Often after I had clung timidly down over the 'vertical' smother of one frozen wave into

the white trough above the next, the touch of my outstretched foot would upset every calculation of the eye, the snow would meet it on an unexpected curve bewildering to the balance. And then I would look upward from below at my vertical illusion and decide to reduce my estimate of the angle to a generous 45 degrees. Where there were genuine ice-breaks Hugh Pope was always below me, ready with his immense reach to make me a handrail of his axe and arm down any cliff of under twelve feet. It was a convenience that saved all the time and trouble I should otherwise have had to spend upon fixing a double rope for my descent.

As we came down among the lower glaciers, and out of the light of newer fallen snow, the irradiating whiteness of the day diminished; and with it memory grows indistinct. Both the whiteness and the pictures which return in it came to an end when we reached the dark August woods of the Zermatt valley; and I have no idea what happened to us afterwards. But the crystal of the day stays undimmed. I see it with its globe set against the sun; and within it all our movements and our impressions are reflected in light, as though they had been the scintillations of wind upon water or the lightness of snowfall upon sunlit snow.

CHAPTER XI

MOODS AND SHADOWS

Wind from the stars, wind from the infinite. . . .
the very storms that dress
your passage with the panoply of sorrow
seem like a mother's tears
who weeps a little anguish with her child
and smiles to think 'twill all be gone to-morrow.
From pole to pole you pass
tossing our childish griefs on wings of laughter,
breathing dream-fancies on our fear-dimmed glass.
Even as you chant of anger, strife and death,
gusts of unbidden hope leap echoing after :
Wind from the silence, wind from the shadow of sleep,
what have you seen within the rayless deep ?

IN a little company by themselves congregate recollections of climbs, or of moments upon climbs, when some wild mountain humour or a surprise of human temper made a contrast as noticeable as a dome of many-coloured glass with the general tenor of the day or the normal white radiance of the scenery.

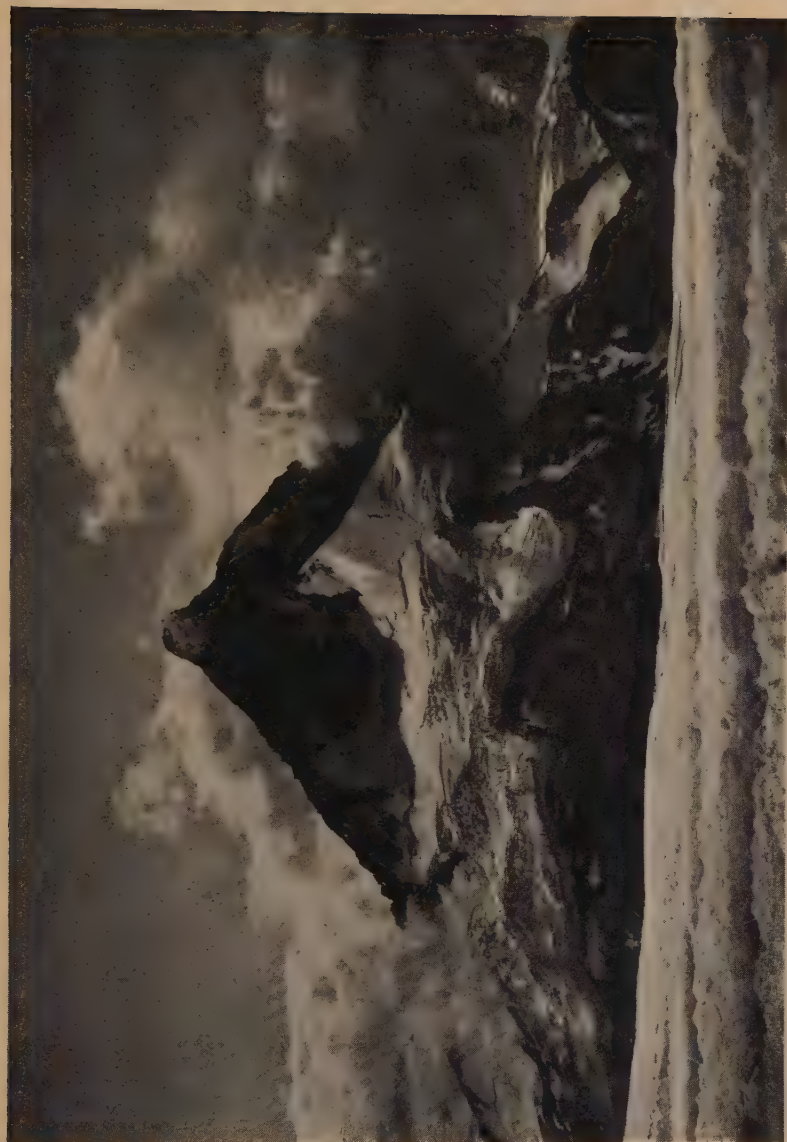
It might be the extravagance of a storm, crying havoc across our current of sociable adventure. Or in our relations with each other some mood, collective or individual, might declare itself inconsistently, and subdue the mountain views and happenings into a sketchy background for our tempers. Or again it might happen that the feeling born of some later mischance cast a shadow backward over scenery and persons alike ; so that whole days preceding it can only afterwards be recalled through its intervening shadow. Our crossing of the col Tournanche, for instance, is remembered only in light ; but the light belonged to the day and to the climb. Our ascent of l'Isolée, on the other hand, is seen only under shadow ; but it is a shadow that did not belong to it, a darkness borrowed in great part, I believe, from what came after.

Upon my first ascent of the Z'Mutt ridge of the Matterhorn,

which was then still looked upon as an adventure, the personal interest predominated. Our collective mood was little short of hilarious, and memory has very suitably chosen for its setting the dark evening hours before our climb. There was no Schönbühl hut at that time ; and singly or in pairs three or four parties of us had tramped up the glacier into the ice-bay under the north face of the Matterhorn, and thence clambered up in the dusk to the shelf scooped out of the side of the ridge which served as the historic gîte.

It was a small army collected there under the stars. The gleam of our wood-fire, which could make no impression upon the towering blackness of the peak above or upon the night-silence widening over the glaciers below, danced and reddened valiantly over the figures of a round dozen of porters and guides, sprawling and chattering upon the freezing ledges. As it transpired, for their coming together was accidental, they were nearly all brothers or cousins. A 'Weisshorn' Biener, Josef and two other Pollingers, Josef, Gabriel, Franz and Julius Lochmatter, several Brantschens and Imbodens : all the reigning princes of adventures, most of them young still and effervescing in noisy spirits at their meeting. For hours in the half-shadow round the firelight we sang and yodelled patois songs, and told thrilling stories ; and when I at last snuggled down in my sack, I hugged myself with the excitement and the companionable delight that belonged to those years.

The predominant personal interest spread itself over all that I can remember of our ascent next day. Josef Pollinger's superb confidence, and the defiant gleam of his blue eye as he elected to hold to the line of his original ascent with Mummery and Norman Collie, and dashed out on to the great wall of iced slabs, whereby a diagonal return was to be made to the edge of the Z'Mutt ridge near its junction with the mountain. R. W. Lloyd's loyal following of his leader. Josef Lochmatter's dubious smile, as he yielded to my insistence that it would be safer on that day to dodge the slabs, and scale the over-steep but ice-clear crags above our heads, directly to the edge of the ridge. And again his melodious chuckle when—that novel short-cut accomplished—we sat on the crest above the slabs, with our heels drumming over immensity, and watched Pollinger chipping, creeping and swinging royally up to us, out of the black depth of the most fearsome of alpine couloirs. Then, the race of the giants in rivalry up the slippery, motherly galleries of the face : the gleeful exchange of insults where we tailed out in line again up



Zermatt Ridge

Z'Mutt Ridge
MATTERHORN
from the North

Italian Ridge

the higher ridge, under fire of each other's back-kick of snow ; and the comic resumption of dignified unconcern—with a twinkle in it—as we all gathered upon the summit.

The interest of that adventure was wholly and delightfully human. The Z'Mutt ridge had to wait for a later day, and for a lighter social handicap, before it could impress the features of its own personality upon memory.

Our attempt upon the Furggen ridge of the same mountain lives in the light of a different collective humour. V. J. E. Ryan, with Josef and Gabriel Lochmatter, met us at the Schwarzsee hotel. It was our first meeting, I think ; and Ryan had come there as it happened bent upon the same errand as myself. We agreed upon an arrangement, which we subsequently repeated on other big climbs, that we should work in association, but keep to our separate ropes or parties.

In a starry darkness and with an iron frost on the rock under-foot we climbed on to the ridge north of the Furggjoch, and arrived at a high and breezy ledge near the junction of the lower ridge and the mountain. Here Ryan during previous explorations had contrived a sleeping-place and a store-cupboard. With his frozen store we filled up some of the time, and space. But the cold wind cramped our patience ; and still in awkward darkness we started again, and crowded up the narrow crack which leads up from the lower Furgg-grat on to the Furggen ridge proper.

Now the Furggen ridge, however proper, is in this section little more than a retaining rim for the great south-east face of the Matterhorn. Once up the crack, therefore, and on to the rim we were grieved to find that we could career over the ledges of the south-east face in any direction that we pleased.¹ We chose the path of rectitude, and the line of least resistance, straight up the broken cliffs : leaving the rim to dance modest attendance upon an outward bend of the face, and only rejoining it where it swerved inward again above and showed some intention of regenerating into a ridge.

I happened to be looking up at the shadowy Matterhorn head, far up in a lightening sky, when an outrider of sunrise leaped upon it, roughly and ruddily. It loosed a purr of falling stones in the air about us. We were then still out on the face : so we swung rapidly out to our left, and met the return-swerve of the steepening and repentant Furggen ridge half way. Thorough-paced crag-work on an heroic scale hunched us up, ridgewise, by red elbow and shoulder as high as the collar of precipice

¹ Illus., facing p. 358.

which supports the heavy triangular head of the mountain. Here the Furggen ridge ends its short and nervous effort at independence, shying away with a startled fling of its crest from the oppression of height brooding above it. A small white saddle or link alone maintains the unwilling connexion between ridge and peak.

By brown and much battered slabs patched with ice we reached this white notch. It must be one of the oddest perches even among mountains. It was so short that but two of us could sit astride of it, one in the snow saddle, the other on the rock crupper. The rest roosted on brick-ends under the overhang of the head. I looked down my left leg, at the stupendous downfall of the south-east face, crumbling and scurrying to the Matterhorn glacier. I looked down my right leg, into the bottomless pit of the vast southern couloir, in which, thousands of feet below, the night mists were still simmering and nosing round the merciless walls. My back was against the mountain; and the higher precipices jutted out over my head, rust-roughened and cinder-coloured, in contorted strata.

Ryan had hoped to be able to force a traverse right across the southern face, from our Furggen notch to the Italian ridge. But the hope died at the near sight of the peeling, shaly shelvelets under continual bombardment. That a later party should have actually started upon this route, after seeing what we saw, is even more surprising than their luck in escaping from it alive on to the summit. Alternatively, Ryan argued for a direct assault upon the unclimbed corner bending into the sky above us. Simply as climbing we agreed that the corner would go; and I still think so, although our only successors were driven to use ropes slung to them from above rather than the rocks of convention. But, down the only possible line of attack a fusillade of stones hooted invisibly. On the other hand to descend by the way we had come was a dull notion; and further, with the sun and wind by now both in league upon the cliffs above us, our modest rim below was likely to be exposed for most of its length to their stone-fire. Where we were we were sheltered; but we could not move up or down or right or left without coming under fire for shorter or longer periods. Where stones are in question Edgar Allan Poe has the right of it: "In all kinds of climbing it is, as Catalani says of singing, easier to get up than to come down." For my own part, because it seemed to offer the narrowest stone-zone and the easiest way out, I inclined again in favour of my own original plan, which had been to reopen Mummery's

unrepeated route of some thirty years before, and traverse across the south-east face to the Swiss ridge.

Our suspense, no doubt, did something to preserve the memory of this place. But the personal element presides over it; and our discussion as we shouted against wind and stone-clatter upon that high and singular snow-crotch, has overwritten all other impressions. Ryan, ruthless in his ideal aspiration; myself, in that tug of war between desire and conviction which has no issue but in laughter; one Lochmatter enumerating an increasing family, the other protesting a betrothal, and a similar prospect; Knubel, always objective, shrilling in the pauses—"Aber Steine—aber Steine!—na—Herr!"

In the end we agreed upon the traverse to the Swiss shoulder. And again it happens that the feeling of personal superiority to adverse circumstance—which our recovered unanimity at once restored to us—is my principal memory of the risky passage. The start of the traverse, from the notch, was not easy: down a house-roof of slab and under an overhang. With envy I watched Ryan's prehensile feet and flexible ankles on these slabs. He looked to be able to lope upright and at ease across any smooth tilt, even with his legs at any acute angle to his boot-soles. In quick time and with upturned eyes we stole across under a slack in the overhang above, down which the Furggen corner was bound to hurl its main rubbish. It is no great distance from the Furggen saddle to the snow shoulder on the Swiss arête; but although the Matterhorn was first conquered because this face was found to be far less steep than it looked from afar, yet when we are upon it, we find it to be always a little steeper than it looks from close at hand.

Across the featureless, ill-conditioned wall, cumbered with weatherings and sulky with snow, we wound forward, twisting our arms and legs agreeably to the demands of loose holds upon eroded rocks:

Unhappy, most like tortured men
 Their joints new set, to be new racked again,
 To mountains they for shelter pray;
 The mountains run about, no less confused than they.

Cowley might seem to have known what it was like to make a steep traverse on crumbling rock. Happily, the greater part of the crossing lay under cover of the overhang: the stones that fell whistled past outside us.

The last two hundred feet, which were to land us at the very top of the well-known snow shoulder on the Swiss ridge,

proved as we expected the crux. About fifty feet below us a repulsive snow-band offered a possible alternative ; but I remembered that Mummery's party had been tempted in the same way, and had only lost time. Some hundreds of feet lower still the difficulties of the landing looked to disappear ; but in order to descend so far we must sacrifice such shelter as the cliffs above gave us from stone-fall. So we held to our high line. Josef Lochmatter crept on, clinging like a spider. Soon I noticed that he was advancing as imperceptibly as the hour-hand of a clock, while the two on the rope behind him were stationary upon no less imperceptible holds. Behind me Knubel had our rope hitched to the last firm knob upon the face—and one of the very few we had found. So I suggested, charitably, that we should join our rope on to theirs, and act as an anchor. With all five of us strung out on the full length of our joined ropes it proved just possible for Lochmatter to lodge himself securely on the snow shoulder, before Knubel was forced to leave our ultimate knob. Virtue is its owner's reward. When our turn came for the hazardous spider-crawl, Knubel and I profited by our altruism.

Much of the crowd which had assembled on the shoulder, to watch us and bellow that the traverse was impossible, had by now dispersed up or down ; and we managed to jostle our way to the summit in some twenty minutes. But the human element was still very much *in excelsis*. If he had been present at one, John Duke of Buckingham could not have described a 'levée'-day on the Matterhorn more realistically :

Behold some toiling up a slippery hill,
Where, though arrived, they must be toiling still ;
Some with unsteady feet, just fall'n to ground,
Others at top, whose heads are turning round ;
To this high hill it happens still that some
The most unfit are forwardest to come.

Solid peasant-engines at every level were hoisting themselves and yet more solid tenders up the maze of ropes and chains which are twined like the straws of insanity round Cervin's sombre head. At the Schwarzsee the day before we had even been asked to subscribe to the renewal of these cords. Perhaps the fragment of pack-thread which we found dangling down one knee-polished slab had been left there as a hint. Ryan picked up the end, and offered it with an inscrutable smile to a guide who was blocking our way, as "something that seemed to be hanging out of his pocket."

But the hour upon the summit nothing could spoil. A few steps this way or that off the snow-crest of the Matterhorn, and we are out of sight and hearing; and there—always—a world is well lost, and a world well gained.

For the descent, well, there was nothing but to get it over. We unroped above the snow shoulder; and Ryan and I fled away from the guides, and down, in a competition to escape from our own depression. We took, I think, less time than did my first race down with Theytaz; and our hurrying need not be excused to anyone who knows this ridge on a hot and populous day. The personal element pursued us still. A lonely lunatic, whom we passed while he was descending, remarkably, on all fours and face upward, discharged after us—from some of his many points of contact—succeeding hundredweights of débris. Our shouts had the effect of stopping him moving the mountains or himself until we could climb out of range; and he filled in the interval by howling after us instead, dismally and derisively. As we dodged safely out of the lower end of the last big couloir, a wail and a fresh eruption of stones warned us that he was again in four-in-hand action:

Among the rocks and winding crags
Among the mountains far away
Once more that ass did lengthen out
More ruefully a deep-drawn shout.

Boiling with heat and headache, but relieved, we ran down the last dusty nose of rock on to the Hörnli: to find ourselves in a final ambushade of tourists. They rose in a semicircle at our coming; and the human note which had dominated the day sounded triumphantly to the end, in the simultaneous click of their uplifted kodaks.

Memories of a collective depression, or of our humours clashing among ourselves are, perhaps naturally, scribbled large over the stories of our failures. It is perhaps equally natural that most of these memories should belong to northern aspects of mountains. There was our early exploration of the north ridge of the Dent Blanche: where we only agreed to agree upon the right solution of the difficulties too late to make the attempt in our generation. There was the north face of the Grandes Jorasses: which divided us in opinion and in resolution, until we found a common ground in action by turning our attempt into a frolic. There was the north wall of the Matterhorn, upon which I could never get more than a consent to a preliminary skirmish; and which we

abandoned unanimously in the end until such time as we could arrange to have the Swiss ridge closed for the day to other climbers and their volleying stones. The little personal cloud which overshadows in recollection the mountain view of each of these places will only be cleared away when as happy a party shall at last have a better success in climbing them safely.

In polite record we are accustomed to ignore our losses of temper. But the thought of them is bitten with acid into our own minds. Less civilized humours are inevitable among men acting together under primitive conditions, and they are the common danger of all joint adventure by sea or land. If we are "to say with seriousness what we pluck from danger and discomfort," so as to produce "an account of a climb which those who have shared the experience will acknowledge to be no more and no less than the truth," these moments too must be given the importance which they had for us. The common forms of mountain ill-temper are two: the blaze of unreasonable anger, as elemental as our environment; and the groundless resentment, accumulating slowly under long strain, which feeds upon silence and the vanity of self-control. I remember an example of each, and I like to think that there may have been no more.

The Dent Blanche is one of those mountains which, under given circumstances, can be climbed by one man alone. The opportunity came when Josef and I were climbing with a young mountaineer who was at just that stage of inexperience when his hands and feet can be trusted not to make mistakes, but when the management of the rope impedes more than it profits him. We had intended to repeat Whitwell's ascent of the south-east face. But the crags upon it were nodding under snowy night-caps; so we turned up on to the usual route by the south arête. The towers were flanked by hard and encouraging snow slopes. Our experiment worked well. The two ahead of me travelled in better rhythm and pace without a third on the rope. At varying distances I followed on my own line, enjoying the unaccustomed freedom; sometimes lagging until I could see and feel myself entirely alone, sometimes quickening to recapture the pleasant sense of companionship.

We collected upon the summit, in that year a white and polished cone. And there a high wind over-ran us. The conditions for our descent altered at once. The snowy rocks grew crusty with ice, and the touch of them numbed fingers as yet unpractised in climbing down. The gusts, tipped with cold like spear-thrusts, slowed our muscles and hustled us out of tune.

The excusable deliberation with which the pair ahead were descending the exposed walls seemed at each tower more baulking and inconsiderate to a shivering solitary climber behind.

And then absurdly, and to my own surprise as much as to theirs, the tension snapped in a clap of temper. It was not more effective than it deserved to be; nor was it in the least resented. On the platform wild what little human nature loses in decorum it gains in intuition and indulgence. My unwarranted anger was blown to bits by its own spontaneous combustion; and our descent wound on silent and unruffled into a peaceful oblivion. But in my own mind there continued to burn a warning beacon, of amused horror. So this could happen, in oneself, ungovernably: thunder out of a clear sky! Here was a new and subtler peril to guard against, if the mountain gloom could make accumulators of our nerves, and discharge the current devastatingly, at weather-will!

For its second sorry exhibition temper chose the entry in slow time. After some strenuous days of guideless climbing from the Concordia, three of us had fallen back upon a half-day ascent of the Jungfrau, because it would allow of our returning down the Aletsch glacier to Belalp the same evening. The long and soft snow-firn was at its woofullest, and drove us to the last expedient, a hundred steps and a halt, with a change of leader at every thousand. The snow recess under the mountain was a cemetery of brown sacks, and the white sickle of the peak crawling with railway-borne life. The steps of our predecessors were cavernous, leg-racking if we tried to stride up them, and abysmal if we fell into one on the descent.

We were not a little jaded, when in the afternoon we started on the fifteen miles or so of glacier-fall to Belalp. The crevasse systems were all open that year. On the ascent of the glacier some days before we had been driven right off our line and across to the Märjelensee, and still had not found a through-way. So we determined this time to cut the knot, take the bend on the inside, and rush the falls as they came. We fixed our ice-claws, lightened our sacks to the last raisin, and steered into the maelstrom.

The great islanded cubes of ice above the bend could not be treated cavalierly, and delayed us into a maze of recoils and pirouettes among quadrangular crevasses. But once the great and more continuous downfall began, we leaped straight ahead, taking ice flake and flying bridge and blue chasmic jump as they came. It became a steeplechase with sunset; and I look back

upon that 'lead' with secret pride. For bone-shaking and sensational as the line proved, and some of the endless succession of downward jumps were as wide as they were alarming, we never once had to retrace our steps. Through the lower icefalls memory and the half-light served us just sufficiently well, and we grounded on the rocks beside the glacier and below Belalp under the very nose of night.

But pace and the need of furious watching and calculating had kept us long silent, and silence is perilous for tired men working overtime at express speed. Mallory sagely melted ahead up the dreary track. But as Donald and I sat for a few minutes to watch darkness blotting out fall after fall of the shining miles of glacier down which we had come, I felt darkening as densely between us a marsh-mist of grutchiness, irrational and therefore the more exasperating. In vain I searched memory for some safety valve, some mistake in the day to swear about. Useless! the mood was literally an umbrage in ourselves. In silence, and feeling both cross and foolish, we got to our feet and ground on up the track; while the world grew more bitter and more black within and without.

We were more than half-way up, still glowering into our unspoken darkness, when two little peepholes into another world of green and laughing light opened through the shadow round our feet. They were two glow-worms. There is something supernatural about glow-light. It is mocking, but serene and severe; young and yet older than knowledge, responsive but icily inhuman. It laughs at us, but it laughs for itself and to itself alone. We stood and looked into the two green specks; our depression ended as inexplicably as it had begun; and we both laughed. We puzzled over the healing miracle exhaustively as we raced on in excellent spirits; but of course there was no watertight explanation. Man is the captain of his own soul—weather and mood permitting; and the best an old seafaring hand can do is to resume the mastership of his ship of fate neatly and plausibly—during the intervals of plain-sailing.

When the mountains on their side sulked or stormed, their moods could prick out very unforgettable moments. Their ordinary tempers, of snow, rain or gale, were part of our day's work; but when they chose to sulk savagely or to lash out in earnest, the stoutest pilot could only hang on to a rope's end and watch for a lull.

I remember a sullen fit which made a terror of that honest pass the col d'Hérens. We had trudged light-heartedly up the

Z'Mutt glacier from Zermatt, and made a game of the frank séracs up the incline of the Stock glacier. Upon the high white pass we stopped to put on the rope ; for the good reason that Knubel and I had both of us slipped a foot through, simultaneously, into a concealed crevasse which had no business upon the summit. On the far side the Ferpècle glacier sidled away from us in wide snowfields, folded here and there into snow-covered icefalls. Even as we started down the snow contours began to grow indistinct : a broad head of mist was stealing up out of the valley towards us. Soon it was about us, and over us, too dry, white and transparent, as it seemed, to be a hindrance. And then it discovered its deceit. The mist was of exactly the same tint as the snow, and as the sky. We thought still to see the surfaces clearly ; but all distances and curves had become confused, identical. We were like the Carisbrooke donkey, pacing forward inside a continuous wheel, of uniform tint above, in front and below, and as uncertain as the donkey must be whether we were going upward, downward or on a level.

We must have wandered too far to the left. For we found ourselves bogging in a web of snow-covered crevasses. From my outlook at the tail of the rope Knubel, in the lead, seemed to be behaving very oddly. Again and again I saw him blunder, as it seemed deliberately, into crevasses which were quite obvious to me further behind. After three or four disturbing repetitions I decided that he must be suffering from an ' off-day,' and altered the order, swinging the rope round and myself taking the lead. And immediately I began to make the same exhibition of myself. Round my boots the snow surface was as plain as daylight. As I lifted my eyes and explored the greyness ahead for signs of a crevasse, I seemed to see all right. But I had hardly taken three steps before over I stumbled, on the slipping edge of a crevasse, which at once became provokingly distinct. Under the circumstances the rest of the party, I felt, showed admirable tact in not giving expression to the reproachful surprise I could now, in turn, read in their faces.

This could not go on : the hours were passing, and we were making no headway. There was nothing for it but to give up the attempt to descend, strike upward until we were again on the easier snow-contours under the pass, and then follow round upon a compass-line through the indistinguishable circle of snow and sky and mist until we could sight the rocks of the Dent Blanche. They at least might give us our position.

Mallory took the compass, near the end of the rope. Harold

Porter and Pope followed behind me, as effective as steam-cranes upon my rope whenever a fresh snow trap gave under me ; and I forged ahead at best pace, feeling insultingly helpless. I knew that most men's inclination in fog is to turn to the left ; so I took my axe in my left hand, and allowed for the probability in my stride. I knew too that in order to turn right-handed I should have to turn perceptibly up-hill ; and I had, further, Mallory's voice a hundred feet or so behind me, correcting me if I made any deviation. And yet, although I had all these reasons to know that we had in fact kept a straight line, by the time we came in sight of the rocks my brain had registered one complete and a second half circle to the right, in flat contradiction of what I knew to be the truth ! The instant the dark walls of the Dent Blanche showed, at a great distance, through the mist, all the surface between us and them became perfectly distinct. I should have felt certain that the mist in that quarter had lifted, had I not seen it to be just as opaque whenever my eyes left the rocks. By keeping some rock-outlier always in view, our descent from that point went easily enough. I puzzled all the long way over the problem.

But in Chamonix, H. O. Jones gave me the explanation at once. In the surrounding uniformity of tint, our eyes had had nothing upon which to focus, and the effect was equivalent to blindness. At the tail of the rope, the dark figures ahead of him would help the last man to a considerable range of vision. At the head, to the leader, beyond the small area served by his black boots if he looked down, everything far and near was fogged into a strained confusion, because his eyes, unable to focus upon any single point, were equally unable to distinguish or penetrate. But the moment any darker tone, such as the distant rocks of the Dent Blanche, broke through the monotonous semi-transparency, the eyes could adjust themselves, and all the fainter incidents between them and the rocks became again visible.

Not long afterwards when two or three of the younger mountaineers—from whose short holidays the time could least be spared—with a memorable sympathy crossed the range to help us after the accident at Courmayeur, George Finch told me that he had in similar conditions tried with effect the expedient of squeezing snowballs till they became dark in the hand, and then throwing them forward, as a guide to the eye for the surface over which they travelled : a good counter for a dangerous mountain mood.

A more insidious mountain humour was near proving more fatal. It has been asserted that by an expert eye a crevasse however concealed can always be detected. It is convenient also to assume that where crevasses never have been known to exist they are non-existent. But it is unwise to make any assumptions in mountaineering. An unusual season may take very unexpected forms of expression.

In a year hitherto unique for its fine circumstances, before we had had time to discover the new forms of danger which such circumstances can produce, our party began its serious climbing by an attempt upon the south buttress of les Ecrins. We slept out beside the glacier du Vallon de la Pilatte, through a thunder storm which may have been intended for a danger-signal. In the early half-light we started up the furrowed snow-slopes below the face of les Ecrins. It is a névé upon which all authority informed us that no crevasses had ever been detected. We halted where the slopes steepened, to fix our ice-claws. In the course of some previous days of pass-wandering between the Meije and the Ecrins, a competition in ice-glissading down narrow couloirs with Laurent Croux and Knubel had left me the reminder of a bandaged left hand. The others therefore were well ahead by the time I had fixed the claws and started in pursuit.

The surface was of that corrugated, old-snow kind which is of all the most reassuring. I had the claw-marks of five hardened veterans to guide me; and the automatic glances which we throw by instinct to right and left upon all snow, to detect the remoter shadows that give warning of the proximity of a crevasse, revealed to me only an unwavering respectability. And then my foot went cleanly through. I flung myself forward with my axe instinctively held fore and aft. My second foot followed. The little circle of world-crust which I commanded sank without a murmur; and I dropped upright through space.

It was certainly not alarming: hardly even unpleasant. As I am convinced happens in these accidents where no chance of action upon self-behalf remains, my consciousness was at once shocked into an observant detachment. "So it's your turn, after all; the inconceivable is happening to you too!" it commented protestingly. "Well, of course you'll be killed; people are by these things! But, equally of course, you being me, and I still I, you can't be!" Over all, there was a superficial, part-gratifying part-agonizing excitement as to the event; and, under all, a flame-like intensifying of the essential Ego, of the individual vital principle, subduing for the second into its single

assertion of self all sensation and all eternity. They are both stages familiar likewise from our memories of the first spinning and of the later deepening of unconsciousness under anæsthetic.

I stopped. The axe had jammed, head and spike, across the ice walls; and my right armpit locked over its shaft, rigidly. Simultaneously, the soft snow which had fallen with me packed softly against my chest and back, and helped to support my weight. I kicked tentatively. My feet moved freely in space, between widening walls; and the movement released a little of the packed snow, which swished and hissed down into a silence that betrayed no bottom. I looked up through semi-darkness. Some fifteen feet above me stretched a wide and flat roof, vanishing in gloom to right and left. Its underside was glazed and stuccoed with small icicles. I guessed at once that in a normal year this lid would be carrying a depth of snow above it which could conceal any signs of a crevasse underneath, supposing one to have existed. But this year the snow had thawed away above, and perhaps the ice had opened wider beneath; until nothing was left but a skim of harmless-looking old-snow, resting upon a level roofing of ice, ready to break at a touch, but neither sagging nor shadowing perceptibly above. Under the lid the inner walls of the crevasse first bulged, and then receded on their descent, something like the inside of an hour-glass. I, or rather the axe, had jammed in the narrow neck. The falling snow, arrested by my obstruction, had therefore been able to pack helpfully on the ice-bulges under my chest and shoulders. Right in the middle of the stalactite roof was the neat hole of light through which I had fallen.

As a schoolboy, clambering once upon the roof of the cloisters, I had fallen, or rather bounced, through a skylight. Looking up then from the pavement twelve feet below I had been amazed to see that only one pane was gone from the skylight, and that I had shot through a single small square of frame. It looked so improbable that my shoulders could have come through it longways, or my head crossways, that I had had to go up at once again, and make a second try. But I had failed entirely that time to squeeze through it, lacking probably the limp abandon of an involuntary swoop. When I now looked up at the snow hole, this forgotten incident, and all its attendant emotions, returned with ludicrous point. The hole was at about the same height above me, and it looked just as impossible that I should ever have passed through it.

It was not to be expected that the rest of the party could

continue the climb without noticing the shortage of numbers : Josef had always eyes in the back of his head for my whereabouts. At the same time my feeling now was fear of their return. They would see the hole, and make for it ; and as the crevasse was undefined above, they would not learn until too late of the huge extent of brittle ice-vaulting which surrounded the hole. The fear was not solely unselfish ; for I was not uncomfortable, and I had no wish to be driven like a cork through the safety neck of my ice-bottle by any fresh downfall. If I called aloud, they might think I was hurt, and hurry back incautiously. If I did not call, they might be still more alarmed, and in any case remain unwarned until too late. So I tried to tune my shouts from the depths to a note of casual cheerfulness, counting thirty between each, in the hope that the slow rhythm would issue upon them soothingly.

A waiting time has rarely seemed so short. I had hardly time to work my injured hand into the warmth of my pocket, before I heard voices, shouted my warning, and felt the swish of a rope on my head. The noose was ready—they were a prompt party—I slipped it under my left arm, and then very cautiously over my right shoulder, until I could get my right arm through it without surrendering my arm-lock on the axe. A second noose came down ; and I twisted that round my left arm. Then I pushed the packed snow down past me into depth, and swung clear between the walls.

But the ropes, with my weight on them, grooved deeply back into the roof bordering the skylight. A lot more crust and snow had to be carefully cut away from round them, and I was deluged in the process. At last the ropes ran free enough to allow the men to lift me a few inches. I loosened the axe from its sturdy jam, and nicked a foothold on either bulging wall. As I moved up, up went the slack. But above the bottle-neck the walls were too far apart to allow me to straddle across on my opposite nicks. So I turned, and chipped them up the one undercut wall immediately under the ropes, pulling myself up by the noose round my left arm, with the shoulder-noose steadily shortening up in support. The lines formed by the descending ice walls of a great crevasse, glistening down into darkness, are some of the most terrible in nature, even to look down upon. But when we are down among them—the all-enclosing, timeless, and deathly-cold impression they can give us is overmuch that of a tomb. It seemed all the more a smiling world to return to above, of sunshine and pleased faces. I took a further small

comfort from the chance that I had never been driven to use my bandaged hand, for all the mountain guile. Since the fault was my own, the end fortunate, and no one else involved except to his credit, I was not really sorry to have had the experience. It cleared up for me a number of technical points, of procedure, which had been much debated among us in connexion with like accidents.

We were soon at the foot of the south buttress of les Ecrins. It was all lumped and loaded with wet snow. H. O. Jones and I found ourselves simultaneously giving voice to an opinion that these Dauphiné ridge-summits were only to be worthily climbed along their edges. To short-cut them up buttresses and the like was to curtail their characteristic pleasure for the sake of a slight novelty. There are many mountain groups which seem to call for the same consideration of their form; notably the ridges of the Coolin in Skye. So we turned away left-handed, and made a first ascent of the Dome de Neige des Ecrins by its west arête.

Thence we coursed for all a noble day over the continuous ridge of summits, traversing the Pic Lory and the two-way wall of les Ecrins. We descended by the northern ridge; and we evaded the invitation of the glacier Blanc to drop into any one of its enormous crevasses, by crossing them in downward jumps upon a prehistoric kangaroo scale. The confiding gape of these crevasses reminded me at the time not a little of an elephant at the Zoo, which opens a disproportionate cavern of throat in order to invite the entry of yet another minute bun. So "the sprightly kids were bounding on the rocks, the subtle monkeys frolicking in the trees, and the solemn elephants (of crevasses, were left) reposing in the shade."

We slept, for the second time in three nights, at the Promontoire hut. There we decided once again that to make a new route up the wall of the Meije would be to reject what best these ridge-peaks have to offer; and, accordingly, scattered for climbing and reassembled for talk along all its wholesome length of crag to La Grave, on a promenade of some six and a half hours. The rope, I think, on that day only came into use as a time-saving 'double' down the ice-wall of escape from the mountain. At La Grave we had a solid roof over our heads for the first time in a week of free nights and freer days. But of all those moving hours the passive moments in the freak crevasse have scored their mark most deeply on memory. We learn by experience the kind of weather which makes the temper of our older friends

untrustworthy. We learn the same among mountains. And in either case without any lessening of our affection.

Thunderstorms, their bold noise and undisguised threat of dancing light, were among the more familiar exhibitions of the mountains' uncertain temper. The Teufelsgrat of the Täscherhorn must have known this; and accordingly set itself to produce a variation which surpassed, in sheer frightfulness, every other mountain or war experience.¹ I was never interested in the Teufelsgrat as a ridge, in spite of Mrs. Mummery's absorbing story of the first ascent. It protruded itself too wilfully and too pretentiously into an edge, far down among levels appropriated to the quieter glacial curves of mountain bases. But on a day when the whole weight of Skt. Niklaus prejudice was thrusting us at the parlour-tricks of the Leiterspitze or the Skt. Niklaus Gabelhorn, the ascent did suggest itself as the more serious-minded alternative.

We scrambled up the face of the Leiterspitze conversationally, and pinned our not extravagant hopes on to the roughly hogged bristles of the ridge. Since we were only fated to climb three-quarters of it, and the 'last quarter' may always shine with the brighter light, I can express no opinion as to the merits of the ridge as a whole. To look at, it is a high and stilted edge, modelled scenically above the glaciers. For its substance—oyster-shells adhering to rocks can give useful grips at need, and I am told that the tenacity of the limpet can be trained to supply holding indispensable upon the circuit of the Sark sea cliffs. But a long perambulation up the valves of stacked shells, or over the spines of sea-urchins, has something of the pains of a pilgrimage, and probably needs its ecstatic impulse for full enjoyment.

However, we brought our own fun with us. On a high shelf we sat for a very late breakfast, in still sunlight and a cheerful humour. Presently I looked back over my shoulder, and noticed that beyond the sunshine of the long green valley a small storm-cloud, exceptionally black, had formed against the Matterhorn, and was shaking off forked trailers like inky lobster-claws. "They'll be catching it soon round the Horn!" was my thought; and I turned back to our fair-weather shell-bed. And then, squarely upon our backs, fell a hurricane of wind, solid as water. It was a blast that flattened us, gasping and clutching, on to our ledges, tore the looser rocks crashing down the cliffs, and spun the rubble and shaly edges in a continuous clatter over the ridge—"whizzing like soup-plates"—(the quotations are from Marcus

¹ Illus., facing p. 276.

Heywood's vigorous notes). Without a lull the wind screamed upon us, in a mass, for minutes together; until the whole ridge seemed to groan under the pressure. And then it dropped, like a stone, leaving us gulping for breath in a dead, sultry silence.

We could stand up again, and look round. The small black hand on the Matterhorn had spread over all the valley, a quilted darkness; and below it only the foot-tenons of the hills were visible in a moon-green twilight. The sultriness was stifling, worse than the hurricane. We glanced at one another. Was it over? Should we press on? The circumstances were outside our experience. But every line of Josef's doubtful face spoke a warning, the instinct of the hill-bred man, sure but inarticulate. We turned to descend; and out of the murky oppression, a few feet above our heads and vapouring like a steam bath, there began to float single large blots of white snow, furtive and inappropriate.

The metal rims of my snow-glasses began to prick round my eyes: the axe whispered in my hand—unmistakable symptoms. Then out of the deathly silence came the first 'shock,' a sickening, helpless rigidity, that entered at my feet, paralysed every nerve, and escaped in a smarting ache round my forehead, probably at the moist line of the inner hat-band. The whole length of the sharp ridge began to sing. Every jagged point on its edge sizzled or rather jettied on a shrill note, so high as to be painfully inaudible like the escaping steam of a locomotive in a covered terminus. A discoloration of light played along the rock crests, resembling not so much the definite 'blue' of lightning as the transparent quivering we see over a grass meadow in sunshine. Hastily we dashed across the ridge, hoping to find upon the iced slabs of its northern flank an earlier chance of escape from the dangerous edge than its overhanging rocks on the south could offer. Again out of the venomous stillness came the shock, stiffening us to the marrow, and leaving us limp and nerveless to the point of tears. On a natural impulse we put our conducting ice-axes and glasses together under a rock. But a moment's thought convinced me that, on that edge, their retention could make no difference: every salience, including ourselves, was discharging equally. Snow-blindness, on the other hand, was an immediate risk in this hot thick glare, and its effects too dangerous to contemplate. Without our axes, also, we could never escape down any ice-tongue or snow-spit that some relenting in the northern precipices might in time discover to our flight down the ridge. The vital matter was to press on downward with all speed, and with every means left

to us, keeping our axes to help us in our cling along the snow- and ice-coated slabs.

Yard by yard we clambered down again, on a line, wherever possible, a few feet below the lambent, shrilling crest. If I had found the Teufelsgrat more fantastic than difficult before, it seemed all too difficult now, for a mind divided between a dread of the next unheralded shock and the need of concentrating every faculty upon overcoming safely the concrete climbing hazards. The instinct to hurry and chance it grew almost irresistible; and yet every movement had to be more guarded than usual, every 'anchor' of the rope more precisely taken and held, since at any second a keener shock—and they varied in severity with a cat-and-mouse ingenuity—might, if it did not put an end to us all simultaneously, leave one of the men descending below dangling unconscious upon the rope. The steamy murk through which we climbed remained suffocating and lifeless. It gave me the sense of something lowering out of sight—calculating just how long it might prolong the pleasure of watching us struggle before it pounced for the last time. "The hair crackled and stiffened under my hat—the snow-glasses jumped on my head—Joseph was in close confab. with the saints—I should think we were in the field of a severe static discharge—and we felt d——d small."

The flicker of lightning was now sprunting continuously along the crest; and it began to punctuate its threat with blinding flashes. They did not stab into a flame: they seemed to envelop us in a red sheeting of light; and they left us, for the second, dazed and numb. In the same disintegrating fashion, not roaring overhead or about us but exploding with a single shattering detonation right up and through us, blasts of thunder crashed intermittently out of the hot bath of silence. Each clap deafened us for a space of minutes; and in the following stillness we could only make ourselves understood by signs.

Still we swarmed and scuffled and chipped our insignificant way down and across the steep slabs below the crest. Whenever these proved impassable and we were forced up for intervals on to the edge itself, the spines and pinnacles prophesied evil about us with eldritch tongues of fire, and hummed under our feet like tuning-forks. And ever and again we would all stiffen to stone where we clung or climbed, and with a will-it-be-this-time shrinking of thought, the sickening spasm would shoot up, and through, and out of us once again, leaving a nausea of panic and of indignant helplessness. I did not imagine that I could

feel so frightened. But whenever I had time to see him, Marcus had never lost his watchful and smiling composure. Not impossibly the conquest of the thundering Messines ridge, so long and so coolly prepared for by the Second Army Staff, may have owed a shade or two of its effectiveness to the trying hours upon our luciferous Devil's ridge. "At first we clung on to the rocks, which we hoped would not blow away. Then we tried to keep off the crest as much as possible, and dodge the fire. As we couldn't get off, we were in it more or less for four hours." Four hours in the heart of an electric storm is long enough for nerves of peace.

Our eventual escape was not due to any slackening in the malevolence of the storm. But a way did at last open for us down the cliffs, a possibility of snowy slab and chimney, connecting with the Kien glacier. When I read now in other records of exceptional feats of step-cutting, I make a mental reservation in favour of Knubel's hurricane-hitting on that descent. His axe vibrated to and fro rather than swung, with the continuous rattle of a woodpecker calling. The ice-notches and snow-steps unrolled below our feet like a stair-carpet. Down, down we came, out of the gloomy inferno over the spit-fire crest. The crudded wrack of cloud grew yellower on the wall about us, winnowing out round our ankles; until at last we looked down under its hem upon the deep-lying glacier. And the Kien glacier—unbelievably—lay white under brilliant sunshine!

Partial electrocution, in the course of a Turkish bath, could never be invigorating. We dribbled flaccidly down the Kien glacier; where the snow was soaking like lathered sponges into the crevasses, and where Marcus's bid for an anti-climax, in hunting a spongy bridge into its deep home, was very curtly checked. We ourselves were walking in white, moist heat under a blue sky. And yet, close above and beside us, the ridge stretched its incumbent length between the sunlit glaciers, still completely sheathed in dark vapour, which crackled and hissed after us out of its black heart.

The Teufelsgrat knew how to lose its temper impressively. There is nothing needs more personality than to be able to keep on losing temper without any commensurate loss of dignity. Whatever I thought about it before, the Teufelsgrat has seen to it that I shall remember it with respect.

For a last memory of a mood one returns that is seen wholly under shadow. Our humour of the day knew little of it. It



L'Isolée
DAMES ANGLAISES
from the East

was a joyous party and very entertaining climbing, and the later hours were alight with the triumph of standing upon an untrodden alpine summit. But in recollection the pleasant lighting of the day looks dulled, as sunshine does when we have closed our eyes for a moment, and then looked again. It has been overshadowed by the loss which followed, of two of the friends who shared in it; and the shadow is deepened—though this may be in part a reflection from the same later event—by something ominous, almost tragical, in the appearance itself of the peak we climbed.

There is no view in the Alps like that from the col du Géant across the southern aspect of Mont Blanc. In its composition majestic peak and ridge and glacier are no more than minor details. Athwart the middle distance runs the colossal wall, masked with ice and snow, of the Peuteret ridge. From the square black head of the Aiguille Noire up to the snow domes of the Aiguille Blanche—both of them great mountains yet both only incidents upon this immense buttress of Mont Blanc—our eye cannot choose but follow all its mounting line, before it ventures to look across and beyond it. And at mid height, between the mountains black and white, it is caught by the strange pinnacles of the Dames Anglaises. Three of them stand in a cluster upon the perilous crest, and the fourth, and most striking, stands alone and apart.

La pointe isolée, or l'Isolée—I gave it this name after a talk with Joseph Croux in which he had used the term descriptively—is a dark and stately pillar of rock, with a suggestion in its lines, as we see it from this side, of a human figure; a figure burdened with grief, but supporting its sorrow with tragic dignity and in solitude. I compared it at once in thought to widowed Andromache upon the walls of Troy, turning to watch but not deigning to share in the more demonstrative grief of her three Trojan sisters. An accident of structure adds to the illusion. For the dark columnar rocks upon this profile of the figure descend below the level of its feet as it stands erect upon the wall, sweeping down upon the white precipices and between the couloirs of ice in heavy black folds like the trailing of mourning robes.

The southern ridges and glaciers of Mont Blanc are as difficult to approach as to climb; and their awe-inspiring scale discouraged all but a very few explorers in the past. We knew in fact the records of these separate bold expeditions by heart. From my first view I recognized that our chief opponent was

likely to prove this same feeling of intimidation, amounting in effect to an inhibition. One looked—and felt inclined to make excuse; and looked again—and thought of an infinity of new preparation that must be undertaken: and looked a third time—and disposed oneself, sighing with admiration, to wait for the impossibly perfect day. It may be difficult for a later mountaineering generation to credit how nearly up to the present time the age of local superstition survived, as a darkening to counsel, in certain regions of the Alps. Even for us it was difficult always to keep in mind how much of our free and rational climbing we owed to our immediate predecessors, the alpine pioneers, who had wrestled with forbidding wizard clasps and crabbed goblin characters on many peaks and in many valleys which for us lay open, textbooks as simple and popular as any ‘Reading without Tears.’

As a beginning I made up my mind—for technical and irrelevant reasons—that the eastern faces of the walls confronting us, and upon which most of the ventures had been launched, were presumptively the more dangerous. We knew also that the western face, on the far side of the Dames Anglaises, had not even been attempted anywhere between the upper basin of the Fresnay glacier and the gap separating the Aiguille Blanche from l’Isolée. By the way of the west wall, I thought, and this gap we might be fortunate enough to work out a route up the south arête of the Aiguille Blanche which would be free of delaying tradition; and incidentally we might disperse some of the shadows which still clung about the dark inaccessibility of three of the Dames Anglaises—and about our thoughts of them.

The Gamba hut, just built but not yet officially opened, offered us a basis for our exorcism. We walked for an easy day through the woods and up the cliffs and moraines to the new hut, H. O. Jones and his wife with Truffer, and Knubel and myself with a provision-bearer. The hut—since shifted a little after its destruction by avalanche—was theatrically placed, in the centre of the vast amphitheatre of Mont Blanc, on a sloping island of rock invaded by glaciers and commanded by giant ridges. It was bare of all material except a few damp blankets. The stove we brought, and erected ourselves on the second day: little Knubel looking prodigious as he carried in and laid singlehanded a slab for its pedestal which the other and larger men had failed in company to move.

For the first night the new stove was not in action. So to

keep ourselves warm Knubel and I used the sunset light for a scurry across on to the Fresnay glacier. So savage is its ice that in some seasons it is impossible to make a way on to this glacier at any point; and we had to prospect a line through its séracs for the morrow. While I was exploring the rim one way and Knubel the other, I came upon the remains of an old ladder. There had been so few on the Fresnay before our coming that I concluded it must have been left by the search-party for Professor Balfour. The inexpressible melancholy that fills these great glacier recesses, under walls higher and darker than night, made its survival there seem not unfitting. But something of the atmosphere we had still to contend with at that time, in penetrating into this region, may be guessed from the fact that it never even occurred to me to mention it.

The short night, through which we lay uncovered upon bare damp boards, was colder than sleep. We were all ready to start early. Our exploration of the evening before enabled us to unravel by candlelight some very cranky ice-work at the edge of the Fresnay glacier. We slanted across, following the line of any lesser crevasses, to the base of the smooth concave wall of the Aiguille Noire. I have never felt dizzy while looking downward from any height; but I do not believe any man could look up from below at the sheer mile—or whatever it may measure—of that appalling face, and not find he had to steady himself with foot or hand. In its shadow lay, as our exploration had warned us, the one point at which we might attempt with any hope of success the ascent of a portentous icefall, which fell upon us in two successive waves from the basin of the upper glacier.

We marshalled our forces to the attack; and for an hour battled with the wickedest ice I have ever come through. A summer of heavy snow had done little to repair the cleavings and rents made by the previous hot year. The séracs were torn and tossed into spires and domes and castle-ruins of glass, which tottered above the waiting chasms in a way that tried our nerve and skill to the utmost. Our progress among and across them must have looked as little directed to one end as an ant's through long grass—only it was much less safe. One passage in the higher fall could only be described in superlatives. It was a dream for beauty, and as inventive as a dream for fear-someness. By ice-mazes as intricate and palpitating as the secret passages in 'Woodstock' we came to the historic window or 'embrasure' where, we remember, everything ended; and we

looked across the blue gulf from our 'Rosamond's Tower' at a loftier 'Love's Ladder' of glistening ice. An ice-beading ran round its face. Still following the Wizard of the North, we alighted upon this by a long and crooked jump; and shuffled along it romantically round half the circumference of the tower. From the back, over a wider chasm, there sprang out and up a flying arch of bird's-nest crystal, some fifteen feet long and in ill repair. Up this we balanced and crept, to where it ended against a blank wall of ice perhaps forty feet high and of the colour of skimmed milk. Surface cracks and flaws helped us, and there was a boss or so to rest upon; but the fairy-tale spinning of straw into gold was a small matter compared to the labour of fashioning toe and finger holds up such a height of waterfall-ice. And the last few steps had to be cut upon the edge of a flake—which rang hollow. That it might fall was one risk; but we were yet more afraid that the shock of the fall would start an ice-quake, and bring all the crazy castles of bubbled glass ruining over and about us in a general cataclysm.

But that was the last wave. Over the snow-covered upper basin we found easy going at that early hour. Below the couloir, which showed us now a straight white ladder up to the gap between the Dames Anglaises, we sat and breakfasted. It was already full day, but under that westerly wall there was still frost and shadow; and we looked out over a grey glacier at cold peaks, such as had surely never felt sunlight.

We began to stamp snow-rungs up the wintry couloir. It was going to lead us on to the crest of the wall between the isolated point and the most northerly of the clustered sisters; and as we climbed we discussed which of them we should visit. All we knew of them was that they were both unclimbed, and that no man had ever yet trespassed between them. The sun made the decision. A finger of light wheeled down the sky, and touched the summit and the southern face of l'Isolée. But the cold and northern shoulder of her opposite sister stayed icy and dark: there could be no genial welcome for anyone who called there before noon.

Soon, as we stamped on up the snow ladder, the stiff black folds of l'Isolée's mourning weeds began to stand out upon the cliffs to our left, hanging in great mantling precipices from her westerly arm or shoulder. Knubel had a fancy for using this drapery, and not waiting until we reached the gap south of her feet. So we forced ourselves into a narrow upright wrinkle between two folds. For two hundred feet it was steep and un-

propitious, and grievously cold. Then Knubel shouted that it would go no further; and I was glad to be allowed to shout the word for retreat, because I had not seen anything in the uplook of the crack, or in the openwork attitudes of my companions—all of whom I could see in an airy sequence spreadeagled above my head—that had kindled a spark of hope.

L'Isolée had thrown the first shadow, and at a psychological moment. There were defeatist rumours in the chilly atmosphere of the crack above me. Since I now reached the bottom of the crack first, I did not wait for them also to descend, but led straight on and up the broadening snow couloir, keeping under its left wall down which the sun was moving steadily to meet us. Upon that gap far overhead I meant to stand, shadow or rumour notwithstanding; and for what we might do next—sunlight is the best ally against all infection, or cloud.

There was deep, feathery snow on the tiny pass. We stood in it, snow-clamped up to the thighs; and twisted this way to look down at the lightless Fresnay from which we had come, and that way down the enormous Peuteret wall and out over the white glare of the Brenva glacier. We saw that we had been right: the Fresnay face of the wall was still frozen firm and silent, while already the avalanches were swishing and ruckling devouringly down the sun-slides upon its Brenva face. Above our notch, upon the rock crest to the south, the slabs of the northerly sister were stacked up clumsily. We could clearly climb them if we chose, but they were dark and frost-bitten, and not the least attractive. As is often the case with such aiguilles, the slim and Bacchante-like appearance of the trio of Dames Anglaises is effective only if viewed from a distance upon either side. From close at hand to the north their sensational Witches' Dance looked no more than a jumble of broad-backed lounging gossips, with bony, or rather spiky, protuberances. Only the quaintly shaped head of the central and tallest sister projected like an ill-drawn champagne cork over the tumbled group. From our point of view, certainly, Hecate alone of the three looked worth a visit, and there—others had been before us. But immediately to the north of us l'Isolée made a very different picture. Suddenly and smoothly the steep clear lines of the tower sweep up into the sky. If the quiet and formidable elegance is a little studied, as a reproach to the less seemly bearing of her sisters, it loses nothing by proximity. And for all the pointed preference of sunshine, which now embraced the full height of the lonely column while

it left the others hibernating and untouched, the shape never lost its semblance of tragedy, the suggestion of some shadowy grief persisting under all the cheerful reassurances of light.

The sun decided our choice once again. From our snow notch the first forty feet of the isolated tower looked as if they overhung. But the rock was sound and dry, and Knubel surprised us out of an unusual seriousness by saying that he was confident we should reach the summit. He started briskly; and Truffer and I followed him up for twenty feet, in order to back him up over a section that did overhang in fact. After the first forty feet the angle rested, and showed us a comfortable traverse into a corner on our left. There followed two open rectangular chimneys with very little hold, each about thirty feet high. From the higher of them we stepped out on to a broken crest of rock, with snow on its rough steep edge; and climbed it for eighty feet, up to a small almost level platform of snow.

We were now standing on the shoulder of the mourning colossus. The shelf held a large rock, for a belay, and gave us a confident take-off for the last and most severe stage of the climb. It is possible that if we had traversed northward round the neck we might have found an easier way up the back of the great head. But it did not occur to us: the proffer of the cheek receding smoothly above us was enough. From our shelf to a dint on the front profile of the head this slab leaned back, very slightly, for about forty dark upward feet. On the first twelve feet I could see no hold at all. But Knubel tricked his way up them, in his own fashion, until he could catch the point of his axe into the lower end of a threadlike crack which split the upper half of the slab. He pulled himself up, fixed his axe again somewhat higher in the thread, and stood upon it. Thence he swung himself up over an overhanging block that choked the wider opening at the top of the crack. From a good standing-place—upon what must have been the bridge of the nose—he hoisted Truffer; under whose heavier tread the axe slipped down until it caught again in the bottom of the thread. We followed, with desperate struggles. But it was all over. From the nick on the nose a simple ridge led us up and on to the diminutive summit: where Knubel was already sitting. In all, the height of the head from the last snow shelf may have been eighty feet.

The sun beat hotly upon us as our company clung, in different attitudes of rest, all over the small steep cone. Close at hand, across space, the light flung back at us blindingly from the

turreted snow-ridge up to the Aiguille Blanche. Behind that again, and indeed on three sides of us, it was illuminating the whole panorama of Mont Blanc, its pendent ridges and glaciers, and making plain many pleasant possibilities of new ascents. But some impulse made all this brighter circle seem unimportant. It inclined me to look always again in the direction towards which the isolated column seems itself to be turning, and with some reflection on my mind of its own impression of gravity. This view along our ridge to the south looked, in truth, funereal by comparison. The other three Dames Anglaises, a confusion of unrelated gables under soot and snow with one erect chimney-stack, had now lost the little character they had still possessed in our view of them from the white gap. They were insignificant against the overwhelming shadow of the square, sunless precipices of the Aiguille Noire, towering behind them. And this same grim shadow hid from us—it would almost seem now like a shadow fore-cast—the further prolongation of the ridge from the Aiguille Noire to the fatal Mont Rouge de Peutret.

While we rested, the shadow south of us escaped over the sky. The sunny hour had been short and illusory: just long enough to let us share the sombre view from l'Isolée. The day clouded in, and little rushes of snow on the wind chilled the crags below us unpromisingly. We changed the order for the descent, Knubel and myself coming last. Knubel made light of the swing down over the slab on a doubled rope. But a slime of melting flakes makes a new surface of steep rock. We had to climb heedfully all the way to the gap; and it took us as long as the ascent.

The upper part of the wintry couloir had not suffered from the brief sunshine; and since the day had now reverted finally to the greyness and chill airs of overcast height, we were glad to be able to move downward all together, upon our snow-ladder of the morning. But half way down the condition changed. The snow had lost tone, and in patches adhered half-heartedly to the steep dark ice or glazed rock underneath. I was standing at attention in steps; Knubel was moving down to me from above; Jones was below me and I was holding several coils of his rope; while Truffer, below Jones again, was apparently pausing to deepen an old snow-step through into the ice. Suddenly Jones called; and at the same instant, I saw a wave of snow as wide as the couloir sliding away below me, carrying upon it Jones and Truffer and our old tracks.

It flashed through my mind that it must be a second or

two before Knubel, in motion above me, could take position and tighten his rope to me in support. I felt myself safe to hold one man, but I was doubtful if my snow-steps would take the shock of two and of the snow that would pile upon them at a check. At the same time I knew I must brake their pace before they gathered momentum. Jones's rope was running out through my hand. I gripped it. The snow creaked under me: but it held; and for an instant I thought all was well. And then came a second tearing jerk and a doubling of the weight, as Truffer's rope below Jones ran out. My lower foothold began to give—and I must let go, or go myself. Automatically I let the rope run again; but the slide had been at least checked, the rope ran out no faster than before. I threw all my weight on to my higher foothold, and clenched my hand again. Again came the double jerk; but this time more dead, and heavy with an extra mass of travelling snow. I must let go, or Knubel would have three to hold! And simultaneously—indeed the whole incident, long as it seemed, probably did not occupy five seconds—I felt the rope from above tighten on my chest—Knubel was firm in support. I gripped both hands on the rope once and for all. The shock came on us as on one man, and the slide was arrested without a quake or a question.

The afternoon was still covered; and the Fresnoy glacier looked malignant below us, grey-wrinkled with criss-cross crevasses. We had been at pains on the summit to trace out some safer way of recrossing it; for by way of our ice-pranks of the morning there could be no thought of returning later in the day. We had decided to traverse the basin above the ice-falls to a higher point on the rock island, or rather peninsula, upon which the hut stands, and which is formed by the outcropping of l'Innominata between the glaciers Fresnoy and Brouillard. This would mean, incidentally, making the first ascent from this side of the little col de l'Innominata, between the Punta of that name and the Aiguille Josef Croux. The pass might give us difficulty, but could not be so dangerous as the ice.

As we came down upon the glacier the dull light filtered into fog; and the rolling billows of ice, concealing from us the starfish systems of snow-covered crevasses, made it exceedingly difficult to keep to our chosen line. But H. O. Jones's ice-craft and remarkable memory served us well. Without a mistake or a hesitation he kept us, zig by zag, from memory

alone, to the route we had planned in our birds-eye view ; and recalled Truffer more than once from lines that looked momentarily more hopeful.

We landed on the rock spur under the gloomy little pass. The fog was now dense, and distilling into snow ; and we ourselves were as chilly as the cliffs above us, and as white with hoar and snow-drip. A horrid and pernicky little chimney, that wriggled us up through the grey eddies and shadows to our pass, seemed to me the most depressing part of the day. It was, in the first place, a moral anti-climax, and it was also corrupt with slimy ice and all a-slither with spiky waste and grime. At one point it forked ; and Knubel, who was leading, naturally chose one of the two branches. I thought it a spiteful place ; and grumbled dourly to Jones below me that the other branch could not have been worse. To which Jones philosophically replied that, as no one since the beginning of the world had ever yet been up either, there was no reason to suppose the other would have been better !

From the new pass a rugged trough of rock shot us out on to a hillock of old snow, down which we glissaded to the moraines and to the hut. Mrs. Jones, who had been resting for a day, met us there ; and young Paul Preuss. Preuss was a mountaineer of rare gifts, and already of repute in three countries as a writer and lecturer. Three days later he was the sole survivor of the accident on the Mont Rouge ; and he himself fell, while climbing alone in the eastern Alps, within the year.

The snow continued to drift over us all that night ; and in the morning it seemed as if only the ledgeless precipices of the Aiguille Noire and of l'Isolée, black and dolorous in their severity, still stood in dark relief against the grey mists and white snowfall. All the rest of the visible world, the moraine-island of the hut, the glaciers, and all the great semicircle of peaks, was covered with a winding-sheet. We are accustomed to see our light upon a landscape falling from above ; and when the whiteness of fresh snow under a clouded sky reverses the natural order, and throws the higher lighting upward upon the features of mountains, or of faces, the effect is ghostly and estranging.

Anyhow, I felt uncomfortable in the prospect ; and determined to go down, with Knubel. The snow followed us as far as the cliff-break into the valley. And there, over the woods it turned to rain. Such tropical, torrential rain these valleys can seldom have felt. The trees bent and smoked under it,

and the noise upon leaf and meadow was like the roaring of surf. The wood-paths were racing with black flood-water. The only human sound—felt rather than heard through the din and drench—was the flap of our waterlogged clothes and the sucking of our boots. Even Knubel gave out, and took shelter for two hours under a rock. I plodded on. It was impossible to be wetter. And I wanted to be out of sight and sound of those woods, and of that shrouded amphitheatre, and to escape above all from some shadow of unreasonable depression.

CHAPTER XII

TWIN RIDGES OF THE JORASSES

Then they heaped rocks and boulders mountain-high
with stairs of snow
up to Orion's door;
and climbed together singing to the sky :
And no one saw them go.

DUALITY, from primitive times onwards, has been associated with the idea of supernatural force. Twin brothers built Rome, twin brethren saved her. The pairs of brothers or fraternal comrades march through the pages of legendary and classic history, as deliverers or law-givers invested with semi-divine attributes. Old Testament story is rich with the assonance of coupled names ; and as late as the Middle Ages the sincerest of the Lays concern themselves with the achievements of the dual hero.

The Grandes Jorasses may owe a part of their reputation to their position, at the head of the most frequented and most photographed of alpine glaciers. But to my mind they owe still more to a peculiarity in their form. From the north, they are seen as twin summits. Their severity of line is twofold. They duplicate an impression of sublime superiority to their surroundings. It might be over-bold to assume that the twin Jorasses ever wrought as heroes of myth in the Savoyard valleys ; battled as Jura and Jora with the Griffin, the Shark or the Crocodile opposite to them ; or passed their single Giant Tooth from hand to hand, as the Graiae did their single eye, until it was stolen from between them. Whereupon they also, like the Graiae, shrank to stone discomfited, to keep a frigid watch beside their frozen mer de glace. But anyone who has ever marvelled at them from the Tacul or the Périades, twin and greater Sphinxes translated into rock, with their mane of snow flung back against the Italian clouds, will have come a little nearer to the understanding of at least one venerable superstition.

Leslie Stephen speculated, in his own way, as to why the

col des Hirondelles, the passage over their eastern shoulder and the most obvious pass in the region, should not have been attempted before his party crossed it. But mountain-folk have a trick of mysticism; and it is possible that this deification of twinship may give us the reason. Being but demi-gods, a race of climbing giants was able to conquer them; but only in their petrified age. Whympers reached the first peak: Horace Walker the highest. Famous names innumerable followed. And it may be remarked that their ascents were all made from the rear, where the spell of the dual aspect could not work. No one was so daring-hardy as to brave the black brothers on their twin northern face.

It must be admitted that this face is also much the steepest. The nearer we approach to these precipices, the less we are disposed to like them. Most mountains would seem to have been constructed with an eye to the future ascent of man. Their flaws, jointings and cleavages are contrived to suit the compass of the average human reach. But Jorassic rocks were designed for the Anakim. Their ledges recur at cyclopean intervals. If a vertical rift tempts the eye from in front, trial will prove it to have been engraved up a megalithic overhang, which leans out and over until even imagination grows dizzy and faint in pursuing.

The stories of success in the Alps are single, and by their nature often commonplace. The real adventures have been the manifold failures which have preceded the one success, and made it possible. Of these only rumour informs us. We are fortunate if we find the evidence of a discarded meat-tin to assure us that our more deserving predecessors did at least suffer from the same hunger at approximately the same spots. But the rest of their heroism, and the triumph they all but won, have passed with their footsteps from the changing snows of the years.

Of the attacks upon the Jorasses, other than from the south, we only know that they were directed chiefly at the savage East ridge, that from the col des Hirondelles. The notch conspicuous upon this ridge at about a third of its height marked the limit of all these attempts. Mummery and Emile Rey, Davidson and his ascendant guiding stars, Ryan and the Lochmatters, the vanguard of the Duca degli Abruzzi, they were all alike turned back by the gaunt precipice overhanging the notch. Yet all of us who concerned ourselves with the exploration of the Jorasses cherished our different theories of how



Col des Hirondelles

Col des Grandes
Jorasses

GRANDES JORASSES
Northern Face

to turn this barrier. H. O. Jones, after an investigation which must have enriched the mountain photograph-shops of half Europe, adopted an orphan belief that the notch could be turned and the ridge above it reached by the aid of magic climbing-irons and of a glacier which hangs down the north face as straightly as a wet sheet from a clothes-line. Some of us even put our infant theories to the touch. I myself spent more than one night and many futile days upon the beginnings of the central ribs up the north face. The spell of the double sphinx weighed upon us all; and we fled incontinent, with an invariable preference for climbing yet another of the neighbouring Périades pinnacles.

After a number of unfruitful years, Josef and I gave up hope; and "with the West in our eyes" turned our attention to the western ridge, that from the col des Grandes Jorasses. Then came some lean climbing seasons, when nothing was possible but to make plans in England, and forget them in the Alps. Meanwhile Jones had become active upon the Italian or southern side. With Laurent Croux he had attacked the south-east ridge, best described as the ridge round the corner from the col des Hirondelles. Here they were beaten by a continuation of the same impassable band which is responsible for the notch on the east ridge.

Inevitably the drift of common failure, like the drift which assembles the derelicts in the Sargasso Sea, brought us together, and we agreed to join hands across the range. In London—London is the home of unrealized mountain ideals—our plan was to ascend from opposite countries north and south, and by the opposing ridges eastern and western, on the same day, and to speak to each other in passing on the top. After a week of realities in the Dauphiné it seemed a more practical and sociable design to combine forces as far as the Italian hut; there to separate, and each swing out to and then up his chosen ridge, he the eastern, I the western. Jones was a scientist, and I was even less. Empirical research had not told him that the east ridge might not go, so he was going to try from the east. Franz Lochmatter and literature had told me that it would not, so, for want of better argument, I was bound for the west ridge. Any climber will realize that as soon as we came to real grips with the mountain we saw that we should have to concentrate all our forces to do even one ridge; and the romantic meeting on the top, following upon our simultaneous ascents of the opposing ridges, joined the lost legion of opportunities.

I had a premonition that year that it was going to be the season of seasons ; I do not blush to recall how often I said it in the spring, and how little I was believed. I may add in qualification that I used to have a similar premonition every evening in a hut, that the next day was going to be the day of days ; and as fortune proved amazingly indulgent in this respect—I think we were only once turned back by weather in ten years—my agreeable reputation as a ‘*Glückskind*’ was well established. Guides will never allow that an amateur, in action, can be anything as competent as a ‘*prophet*’ ; but they may courteously concede that he is ‘*lucky*.’

The Dauphiné gave us all that we could wish for as preliminary training. Growing in impatience as the weather gave signs of changing, with ever more frequent storms and clouded nights, we rocked and trembled across the passes of Savoy in hair-breadth motor-diligences to Courmayeur. There we were to meet the guides, safely circuiting with the baggage by forlorn Italian railways. No time was to be lost. We arrived ourselves in the evening ; and the next morning we despatched two sturdy porters to prepare a bivouac on the top of the col des Hirondelles, from which we could determine finally and for ourselves whether the east ridge would yield to the unparalleled simplification produced by the hot season. The guides turned up, only accompanied by a patriotic and unwarrantable faith that the luggage would follow. At mid-day we were still waiting. Why elaborate an old story ? Telegrams, Mercurys, motors were despatched down the unresponsive valley. The streets of Courmayeur were trodden alarmingly clean by the to and frowardness of our feet ; and in a rage of resolution we vowed that at whatever hour our climbing boots arrived we would start, if it meant tramping all night.

At eight in the evening fate relented, at nine we set out. I have known few more sentimental openings. To ease our path up the long Val Ferret we had hired the only remaining chaise in the village. Into this were crowded Knubel, Croux, Jones, myself and the driver. The single horse had already been somewhere near to Aosta that day, and was suffering from melancholia. He rarely quickened to a walk. As we stole imperceptibly through the moonlight we could only realize that we had moved at all, from hour to hour, by the slight readjustment of prominent landmarks.

We had other causes for depression. Croux had not had a telegram from one of his guide-sons for at least four days, and

was determined to believe him lost on the Brenva route. His depression was infectious, if not convincing. Jones and I exhausted ourselves in reassurances. Only to be forced in the end to abandon ourselves to the mourning of midnight, and to the marvellous quiet of the moon, as it prowled in and out of the ghostly spires of the Peuteret ridge and reflected haunting lights from the higher glaciers on to our noiseless and interminable pilgrimage up the valley.

The last of the moonlight left us, by this time on foot, stumbling up the wearisome slopes below the Frébouzie glacier. At its foot the sight of the consecrated gîte in the rocks for some unknown family reason proved altogether too much for overwrought paternal feelings. We held out until we reached the porters' tracks on the beginnings of the snow-covered icefall; and then the spirit of tragedy in our midst overcame even our obstinacy, and we released a sorry Croux so that he might return to Courmayeur in time to set out on a search party at dawn. The sequel gave us food for only comic regret. Croux, we learned later, spent a comparatively comfortable night among the rocks in the gîte only a few hundred feet below our sympathetic parting: and the prodigal lad returned riotously living, his only fault having been a preference for wasting substance and time on the dilatory postal rather than on the eccentric telegraphic system of his country. Any later allusion to the obscure part played by seductive gîtes in family reunions used to bring to Knubel's face his characteristic wild and childlike smile, with always a little frown of Pan worrying through it.

The Frébouzie glacier was in an unconscionable condition that year—what glacier was not?—and for myself, not being allowed a rope, I found the trapeze-work among the séracs by the light of a single dip a nerve-racking performance. Being only an amateur of the Alps and not a witch of Atlas—"such as caper . . . on hilltops when the moon is in a fit"—it could never have been said of me with conviction,

With tombs and towers and fanes 'twas 'his' delight
To wander in the shadow of the night.

But we consoled ourselves with the thought that we should get some hours' rest in the good bivouac, doubtless contrived during the day by the porters, on the col des Hirondelles above. Suddenly, in an icy scoop in the very middle of the fall, and far below the loom of the pass, Knubel stopped with a shout; and there, a dark mass, lay the porters, curled up in our sacks, and too

lazy or frightened by the séracs to have even forced a way on to some warmer rocks a short shout away on our right. Brutally and without a word we kicked them out. Knubel crawled into one sack, Jones and I into the other, and we fell asleep in a single breath.

Within an hour dawn waked us, to the grim humour of watching the shadowy porters clacking their cold heels on our tiny oasis of smoother ice. We left them to cower again into our warm sacks, and tracked on, with the pensive feeling that we were depositing a good deal of our party by the wayside and that very little of it showed signs of springing up very high. But the scales had still to touch the beam. We reached the pass at sunrise, only to look down into a coiling blue-blackness of cloud over the Mer de Glace, and to meet a driving storm vicious with stinging wasps of snow. All idea of the whole east ridge had now to be abandoned; but we were still resolute to make certain of the unthoroughfaresomeness of its big notch, once and for all. We left our sacks on the pass at the foot of the east ridge, and climbing rapidly—I think without the rope—after some two steep hours of rock acrobatics we clustered on the sharp little Pisgah on the hither, lower side of the historic notch.

One by one, as we had ascended, the various traverses to circumvent the break of cliff, suggested by more distant examinations, had been sadly rejected as prospectless; and now as we faced the facts closely even the most shortsighted of us was silenced. Springing from the gap before us in a preliminary overhang of sixty feet, the ridge rose a clear hundred and fifty feet above our heads to the first possible standing-place. Indeed from the notch upwards the ridge is no longer a continuous edge. It is a series of colossal protuberances, whose recurrence at intervals marks a salient but interrupted line up the huge rounded butt of the east flank of the peak. On our right, any evasion of the first overhang was barred by a fortification of slab, undercut with a superfluity of naughtiness that I have never elsewhere seen approached. To the left, any idea of a safe traverse was negatived, after a few feet of unlikely wall, by an enormous open couloir, down which all the refuse of the abominably rotten rock on the upper part of the face hooted continually and harshly. Slightly to our left—as we sat astride of the nick and faced the cliff—and slanting crookedly up the overhang above us, was the crack of which we had heard report. It overhung for more than fifty feet, of which the first thirty alone offered some hint of holds.

Like John Silver beside the empty treasure-pit on Spy-glass Hill, without a word we "found our temper and changed our plan, before we had had time to realize the disappointment," and began to examine the alternative chance of a descent of the ridge from above. Above the fifty-foot crack there seemed to be a minute stance, whence a man might be lowered and not suffer unduly. Above that again we thought we could trace, by crack and rib and ledge, a possible route down from the remote impending nose a hundred and fifty feet over our heads. And above this we knew the ridge must ease backward a little, towards the summit.

The descent of the ridge might go; we at least were satisfied that the ascent would not. So we shot down the arête, to the detriment of our breeches, made sure of an easier line for the future through the ingenuities of the Frébouzie glacier, dodged an avalanche that hunted us down into the torrent below it, drank a jaded tea at La Vachey, and trudged into Courmayeur to a late dinner, after some twenty-two hours of almost continuous going and some superfluous mental stress.

We had had enough for the time of the Jorasses; and the Brouillard ridge of Mont Blanc was signalling to us round the corner. The Twins waned into a dim and misty remoteness; and, as is elsewhere recorded, on the next day we trudged the eight hours up to the Quintino Sella hut, took a second day exploring the route up the Mont Blanc glacier, and on the third sped over and back to Courmayeur.

We would willingly have given Knubel a day's rest after his cosmopolitan responsibilities on this last climb; and Jones and I even offered to make an ad interim attempt on the West ridge alone. But Josef was moved almost to tears by the thought of our innocence gambolling in and out of the teeth of such a monster. So we added Laurent Croux again, as an extra hand for the prolonged roping manœuvres which might prove to be necessary on any attempt to descend the east ridge, and set off the next morning for the Jorasses hut.

We had decided to make sure of the descent of this east ridge, of which we felt some immoral certainty, and to leave the moral uncertainty of the west ridge to the still more doubtful future of the weather. Tunstall Moore was the first to attempt this descent. The fact that a party of pace and power had descended the ridge from the summit for six and a half strenuous hours, and had yet been turned back at a point where the guides were of opinion that a further descent would only

be possible with an additional six hundred metres of fixed rope, was not encouraging. But the conditions were now widely different ; and we had the memory of our own previous exploration to assure us that, if we could only hold on long enough and firmly enough, twenty metres of rope and good fortune should see us down the notorious overhang above the notch.

It is a matter of experience that good guides are least enterprising in their own valley. The difficult and the unclimbed in their own region are familiar to them as such, traditionally ; and the voice of an inferior herd of colleagues, clamorous against any challenge to the tradition, destroys their initiative. As the moment approached for defying the terrors of the east ridge, invested for him from childhood with the superstition of inaccessibility, Laurent, our own local providence, was evidently fighting a losing battle with the genius of valley pessimism. From the Jorasses hut, under a slow dawn, we dawdled on a hesitant line up the lower glacier ; and on reaching the Rocher du Reposoir we unroped, and each followed his own angle of inclination, with much better results. We crossed the great couloir to the Rocher Whympier, and having hurried across the higher glacier halted for a time to examine Pfann's enterprising variant up the south face, which rejoins the ordinary ascent on the bluff of glacier just below the end of the rib up to the Pic Walker. Then we advanced separately ; and arrived in leisurely and isolated fashion upon the summit. Jones's recording note-book, which used to flutter like a buff folio-angel in and out of his pocket on the most hazardous passages, gave our time for the ascent as four and a half hours, with halts. There was nothing, not even imperfect weather, to stimulate us. As we looked down over the grim northern foreheads of the Twin summits something of their old spell returned ; and we lounged on the crusted snow, looking out idly, and in my own case rather sadly, over the exquisite view of the Mer de Glace, with its fringe of friendly Aiguilles and its long memories of lost comradeship.

But no sooner were we roped up and fairly over the brow of the east ridge than the mere steepness of our prospective descent braced us like cold water. The incalculable looseness of the higher rocks, every ledge loaded with crazy fragments, called forth our most delicate caution and a heartening freedom of language. Then the ridge stiffened into the bridge of one of its abrupt noses, and slanted us out more briskly and firmly to where its grey tip ended bluntly over space and the deep-seen glacier.

Close to the grey tip we came on some tins carefully lodged in a crack, as if for record, and there is little doubt that this nose marks the limit of the descent made by Tunstall Moore. The height of the whole ridge from the col des Hirondelles is some two thousand five hundred feet. This point is from a quarter to a third of the way down the ridge ; and from here the rocks sweep over in cliffs of a perpendicularity that we should have thought prohibitive had we only seen them from above. The six hundred preliminary feet had taken us less than an hour. The remaining eleven hundred feet, to the notch, took us about four hours : which must serve to suggest the measure of their difficulty.

We secured ourselves above the broken nose, while Croux, with an ever more vocal pessimism, which only drew songs and discords of purposeful gaiety from the rear, cut and clung down a lip of slab under the retroussé tip. It was an awkward passage ; a sharply tilted and holdless slab, with a faint fringe of ice along its descending edge, down which steps had to be scratched. Knubel, as last man, shamed our timid crawl by waltzing down it on a single yodel.

It is difficult to distinguish between the giant steps that followed, as we descended—

through the adamant
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air.

We clambered down crack and edge ; and each time were pulled up abruptly on the grey snout of some huge gargoyle which craned into space and seemed to wriggle with pleasure in the wind at our disappointment. Each time we hoped it was the last protuberance ; and each time over its end the distance to the pass looked further and the angle more shocking. And each time we worked round and down the new nose by some cleft on the south, and traversed back again on to the gaunt curving bridge of still another proboscis.

The final five hundred feet to the notch we had expected to prove emotional. The last but one of the great grey noses skewed out in a vulturine beak, hooked over the Mer de Glace. We peered down from it, and far below us to the right we spied a small grey knob which alone seemed to struggle upward towards us against the universal downfall of space. This we felt must be the bald and egg-like crown of the precipice overhanging the notch. But between us and it lay some three hundred feet of daunting slabs. Their cataract fell not only below us : it stretched away over a steep and rounding profile to our right.

I remembered to have seen from below, beyond this profile, a great open couloir swept by stones, and down its hither rim a possible but dangerous line of descent. Both couloir and rim were now, however, hidden from us by the bulging profile. Whether we could have reached them by a downward traverse across the slabs I am not certain. It was not one of those lines which cry a welcome to us at first sight. It would have meant also the abandoning of our indefinite edge, which, although it overhung, did at least overhang the notch we must reach. We prepared for a zigzag descent down the precipitous slabs below us. They ought to deliver us at the point, far below on our right, where their convexity ended upon a smooth scruff behind the little bald grey pate.

The slabs were faced with ponderous crystal-shaped pilasters, like magnified fragments of the Giant's Causeway, sloped at an angle of some seventy degrees. Between the faceted pillars there were rectangular chimneys, with few holds but good friction. I do not think that there was any portion of our descent here which could not be climbed, up or down, by a first-class cragsman. But, for security, we made use of a succession of doubled ropes; descending each time about sixty feet, traversing on some ledge to the right, and so descending again; until we reassembled on the shattered rock bridge behind the lowest grey pate or nose.

Viewed by a cautious eye over its rounded tip, the fall of the cliff hence to the notch looked like a last sinking of the heart, and far higher than we had estimated from beneath. But for the memory of that little crooked chimney, which must be crinking down somewhere on our right and back again across the invisible overhang below us, it is possible that even now we might have been forced to accept defeat, and might have faced the trepidant re-ascent of the slabs. Our front man was frankly despairing; and even the rearguard chewed its cheeks in silence. Tentatively we crept over the southern curve of the nose, and down the wrinkled nostril; and we recognized, with very little reassurance, the casual opening of our small crack. A shallow angular gutter, its upper half crooked downward through two sections, and ended on a tiny bracket over space. Jones and I unroped, ate bon-bons from green and pink paper on an airy perch, and made conversation; while the guides faded away down the trough. The precipices had treated us throughout with such an air of large disregard that we were almost afraid to catch their attention at this crucial point by any loud or confident speech. It was not that the situation was unusual: we had

been together in a very similar one only a few months before; upon a new Welsh climb. But the diffident feeling which the Jorasses imposed upon us was unprecedented. These crags reckoned by hundreds of feet, where upon other mountains we had been used to deal in tens. It was a bird's flight from any Atlas of a knob to any Pacific slope of a ledge. The norm here was not difficulty, but impossibility. We ourselves, with our restricted rope-manœuvres, were all out of scale. Four mosquitoes, it seemed to me, might look and feel as likely to improvise a connected musical march upon a grand organ by nagging at the pedal-notes.

Presently the whanging of axes on the metal heads of pitons cheered us up. I crept down the gutter; and saw, some distance below, Croux launching himself agitatedly into the void. The rope that held him was passed through the rings of two pitons, which peeped like another pair of mysterious baby twins from an inspired cranny beside the tiny bracket. A long diminuendo of grunts and rope-creaks: a silence; and then from far out of sight below one of the most relieved shouts imaginable from a human throat. It breathed at once the dispersal of many years of doubt, and the ending of many days and hours of anxious foreboding.

We, with our trials to come, echoed it in a cheer from above which still had in it something of defiance. And then Jones followed. The manipulation of the unfamiliar rope-brake had such charms for him that he sacrificed his pet short axe to the impatient Twins and the Frébouzie glacier before he wound and unwound himself gracefully on to the little col. I came next. The first twenty-five feet of the crack, below the bracket, overhung. They seemed to all of us as we descended them as unclimbable by any sane man as they had been pronounced by more competent judges inspecting them from below. Then the crack crooked back across the wall towards the notch; and its interior discovered some useful holds. This was as well, because without them we should not have been able to hold ourselves into the overhanging crack and follow its slant back towards the notch: we should have had to dangle on and down upon the rope much further, until we landed somewhere upon the steep ice-back of the couloir which fell past under our feet from this side of the notch. Whereas, by pulling ourselves into the crack by force of arms, we could follow its diagonal down and across the undercut wall, until it ended upon a horizontal ledge. Along this, almost on a level, we could work across on to the snowy crest of

the V-shaped notch itself. Knubel—one animated grin—rioted down last; and the doubled rope, a rare concession, followed through the piton-ring without a hitch.

Muscularly tired, but content, we lunched once again on the friendly hump of Pissah; and shook our heads, and our cameras, at the ruthless ruin of precipice mocking the air in idle—and an unemployable—state above us. But for the accident of the little jeuking crack, how hopeless would have seemed our project of descent; and but for the holdless section in that crack, how hopeful might still have appeared the prospect of its ascent.

Upon unknown rock, to climb down is always less attractive than to climb up. The physical effort is, if anything, greater; the pleasure in each movement usually less. Nervously, it is more fatiguing; because we are more likely at any moment to take a mistaken line, and with every moment the consequences of such an error become more serious. The lower we descend, the more conscious we become that a retreat must mean a return up an ever-lengthening chain of difficulties; and the appearance of each fresh problem below us threatens us, therefore, more indefinitely. If we are climbing up, the steeper a wall may look to be from below, the better it can be seen, and the more we can concentrate upon our action of the moment. If we are climbing down, the steeper a wall may actually be, the less its difficulties can be seen from above, and the greater becomes the strain upon our imagination, our nerve and our patience.

We were, of course, pleased with our descent of the east ridge: the more so that we had previously proved, to our own satisfaction at least, that it could not be ascended. But at the back of our minds was the feeling that the success would be only lopsided unless we were also to ascend the west ridge; and so join up the expeditions into one sequent traverse of the whole crest of the mountain.

We took a rest-day—our first—in Courmayeur; and spent it on our backs in a sunny meadow, staring up at the imperial skyline of the west arête. Close above the col des Grandes Jorasses, which is its western boundary, this crest thrusts starkly into the arch of sky, outlining its first and nameless castle of defence.¹ In mountain chronicles it was a keep already historical. But as from green alp and forest upward to the water-

¹ By the courtesy of French mountaineers the name of one of our party has since then been attached to this peak.

falls of light down the hanging glaciers, and from the glaciers upward again to the restlessness of unsheltered precipice, our eyes and our debate travelled unceasingly, even this legendary castle came to look no more than a detail, insignificant upon a height of wall which had divided the civilizations of Europe.

We knew the story of its frustrate sieges. More than one gallant cohort had already reached and looked down from its deeply serrated turret. But that had been the limit of their adventure. No one had ever succeeded in escaping down its sheer eastern wall, or in following the ridge further, over its silhouette of scarp and rampike and pilled and gnarled pinnacle, to where it abutted upon the next—and only recently captured—fortress, the Punta Margherita. The rock edge, ice-tempered, flashing and keen as a sword-blade against the high blue air, offered us, one might have thought, little hope of succeeding where so many better men had failed. But the very immensity of the great wall it surmounted, as we saw it from our meadow view, helped to make mere trifles of these its border accidents and peel-towers. We had, too, a cheerful vista of success behind us, and faith in that miracle-working season. I met all murmurs of prostrate doubt with Farrar's oracle—"In climbing, you cannot say for certain that a place won't go—until you have rubbed your own nose into it!"

We returned once again to the jolly little Jorasses hut, Josef, Jones and myself. The conditions of that season were impeccable. But in August the weather became self-conscious, and could not always take its own virtue for granted. The mild thunderstorms, which had been roaring gently in brief evening hours for all the fortnight, now began to blunder upon our nights and mornings. So it came that our twilight hours of talk in the solitary hut high above the still fall of the southern alps were broken by excursions to the door, to watch a cresset of cloud-flocks which herded and scattered like startled sheep about the lower peaks.

We woke to a chilly and misted darkness. Nothing but a traditional good luck justified, I am afraid, my insistence upon starting. But I had a feeling as of coming sunlight behind the night-wrack; and, for better or worse, I maintained that the route must be explored for another day—that hard-worked euphuism!

A silent rush took us up the glacier, and into the lower shadow of the black-throated couloir which leads up to the col des Grandes Jorasses. Here, on a little island of rock in the ice, which protected us against the fall of chance stones, we waited upon the dawn for a cold hour. I sang long songs conscientiously:

because Knubel was always a son of the hills and sunshine, and his moods darkened with the sky. But our surer confidence we drew from the discovery upon the faint horizon of the starry Gemini. To Jones and myself it seemed a heartening coincidence that on all our undertaking that year, whatever the mist and the foreboding of the over-night, these sympathetic stars never failed to laugh in our two drowsy faces whenever the hour of starting came. They had led us on the Ecrins, the Meije, the east ridge of the Jorasses, and on to Mont Blanc. And it was the best of omens that, once again, when we were out to solve the last mystery of the great Twin summits, now one and now the other of these yet loftier twin brethren kept twinkling a silver spark through the driving scurry of cloud, with an assurance of clear skies beyond.

With the first whisper of light we straightened our cold knees for the attack.

Between the bridge by which we crossed the bergschrund and the base, some way above, of the rock buttress up which the ascent to the pass is now made, there reached upward a steeply and deeply hollowed ice-trough. It was the conduit down which the couloir discharged all its refuse of rock and snow avalanche ; and this, and the hot season, had beaten and polished and planed it out, into the shape of a three-quarter funnel of glittering turquoise ice. We had to cross it in order to reach the rocks. Our leader cut steps, on an upward diagonal, over the near lip, and round the concave back of the ice-tube. Under the over-curve of the farther wall he paused, to prospect : and the second man, in order to give him more rope, moved in over the nearer edge. An ice-step broke under his foot. There was the shrill grit of scraping ice-claws and axes—and two-thirds of our party were whirring down the glassy trough towards the bergschrund. At the instant of the fall the last man had been standing in a step on the snow rim of the trough, at a level somewhat below the leaders. His axe had been thrust deeply into the snow, and his rope to the men above ran upward, and over the lip, at a point above his head. Under the fierce jerk of the fall this rope tautened, and slashed downward perpendicularly through the sharp and inclined corner of snow, like a knife through soft sugar. When its deeper cleavage was arrested by the shaft of the driven axe, the rope had already sliced off a pointed cone of snow seven feet high, and two feet through where the cone balanced upon its base and the axe-shaft. A very doughty stroke—seven feet at a blow.

Our leader seemed rather braced than otherwise by the headlong plunge—so fickle a thing is climbing mood. He soon forgot his bandaged hand, while he wrestled with the initial slabs of the over-shadowing rock buttress. For stone-fall this pass has an historic reputation; and the exceptional season, producing a remarkable shrinkage of ice and exposing much disintegrating rock which had never before felt the light, had already alarmed us elsewhere by a horrid precipitation of bartisan and gabion. But this buttress seemed determined to be as original as the season, and so far as we were concerned it kept a clean slate—or granite—or whatever its rock may be. We peered upward, and winced in anticipation; but hardly anywhere could we see past traces of the expected bombardment, those blue angry bruises which the evil tempers of the hills inflict upon their own grey bones. Here and there, as we corkscrewed up the slabs, we passed old wooden pitons, marking passages where the doubled rope had been used by some predecessors on their descent. One of these had been usefully knocked out by stone-fall, and another beaten loosely awry upon a passage where its handhold might have been welcome. The climbing was unvaryingly steep; but, in a half-light full of false shadows, it seemed anything but monotonous.

From the shadow of the grey rocks we emerged suddenly upon the pass, a wind-gap flattened between leaden snow and a low leaden sky overhead. A chilly and rayless sunrise was there to meet us. From the far side of the pass the growling of the northern glaciers came up to us, on rasps of biting wind which flayed our cheeks with the ice-pelt of high frozen snows. A metallic light, hard as a narrow band of dull copper, rimmed the harsh black crests of the Chamonix Aiguilles opposite to us. The air smelt and tasted of frosted flints. While we halted for a standing breakfast on the neat pannier of the pass slung between the rock shoulders of the Rochefort and the Jorasses, we looked out along the lean northern flank of our ridge; and we noticed, to our discomfort, that the night had left a sediment of frozen snow upon all the sparse, stingy, but indispensable ledges. This was serious, since it was upon this side that we expected to have to make most of our traverses.

The first castle of defence is only to be climbed directly up from the pass, by way of the lank steepness of its north-westerly plane. The cliffs start frigidly and sternly from the snow. My friends in front and behind appeared to drift on to them and up them with hateful composure. But I found

finger-tips, which frostbite had rendered sensitive, of small comfort upon the ice-limmed eyebrows that did duty for holds. The whole face was a uniform frown of slab, one and undivided ; and we wandered perpendicularly up it, on a dim and alarming line. From time to time Josef looked down upon my dolorous wriggles with a half quizzical gravity ; the look which betrayed, I feel sure, his real opinion of the motions of all mortals upon mountains, always excepting those of the adored Franz Lochmatter, and some few of his own.

Here and there upon the smooth higher reaches we came upon fixed rope rings : signs of the difficult retreats of earlier explorers. Still we clung precariously up through the hoar northern shadows ; until I became aware of a change in the cold half-light overhead. Through the black sharks-tooth indentations of the crest far above, rapiers of red-gold light, triangular shafts of dancing sun-specks, began to lunge and sparkle, stabbing warmth further and further outward into the dusk of our northern sky. Strangely enough, the sight of them suggested at first a new unease to a nervous mind. How thin was this soaring screen of rock which supported us ! It seemed to be leaning against the surge of hidden light, a dark crust of frost, crumbling already under the heat upon its edges. Already through all its countless facets the southern face, a few feet through from us, must be saturated with the glare of day. A little more, and the whole dark scroll might roll up, dissipate before the flames. Or so it felt. None the less, it was a welcome and inspiring moment when we could at last traverse up and across into one of those golden lancet-windows, and warm our fingers and our hopes in the through-break of sun.

We were on the ridge, not far short of the first summit ; and both behind and before us the crest of the ridge was fashioned like no other that I have seen. It had no continuity, no coherent outline. This way and that way the forked tongues of bronze rock darted and curled ; or more sedately curved alternately to left and right like the separate halves of an abbot's mitre. Secure in their inaccessibility, the solid crests seemed to have abandoned every convention of good rock form. They had burst upward in a rock surf of savage impulse, a foam of frolic with the winds and the wasting of time. Surprised into immobility during some primeval hour of their wild rejoicing, the touch of liquid morning light could still restore to their stillness an illusion of flaming and molten movement. As I stood in a cleft of the ridge, in a wedge of sun-break, the brazen serpent-tongues and barbed

horns of rock about me glowed and spouted once again like lava-jets in the ruddy light. Under my hand and foot was rough rock: but to my dazzled eyes it had the shapes and the very semblance of cloven and misty fire.

It was a cheering welcome, harbinger of a change of conditions that might mean our success. The northerly wall, up which we had come so hardly, was still bleak and unreceptive of day. But as we pushed forward upon the ridge, and from an epaulet behind the highest castle-turret looked out along the Italian face, it was to see the great receding crescent of precipice wreathed in the smiling sunshine of a demonstrative southern greeting.

Our castle formed one lobe of the crescent. The southwestern wall of the Punta Margherita formed the other, facing us distantly across sunny depth. Between us and the Margherita, and curving sickle-wise away to our left, ran the barbaric, flame-pointed ridge. It fringed the amphitheatre of precipice with hopelessness, and finished on to the western of the two summits of the Margherita in an insolent upward swirl of impossibility. To try the ridge would be waste of time.

We had determined beforehand, if nothing better offered, to descend again on to the north face, and attempt to force a traverse along it below the crest of the ridge. Josef disappeared among the red tines to examine this further. H. O. and I were tempted to dalliance with the sun and ice-clear rocks of the south wall. The more we looked over the castle edge, the more certain we felt that if we could only climb down into the amphitheatre, and round its steep circumference, we could leave it again by a ragged dint visible upon the face of the Margherita, and from a conspicuous snow-patch in the dint either traverse up to the higher peak or invent a crack up to the saddle between the two summits. But, could we anywhere get down our castle wall into the bay? It appeared to overhang for a height of some hundreds of feet; and it was this, we knew, which had turned back all our fore-climbers.

We separated, and searched. But it was Josef, I think, who found the master-crack. He appeared behind us on the small keep, and with an impressive solemnity—for had not the incomparable Lochmatters here desisted?—he beckoned us back along the castle wall, a short step to the west. It was not a very promising take-off, a little like swinging off the tower of Pisa on the leaning side. We despatched Jones over it with a double of our light reserve rope in addition to his own, as

an extra-special security and as a propitiation of the shades of our predecessors' failures. But the overhang was a bluff. The crack cunningly concealed holds by the lakh and by the crore ; and from a ledge some sixty feet below Jones was soon shouting to us his reassurances. We joined him. The sun shone, and chink and ledge widened about us with inviting grins. So confident did they make us feel that this goblin of venerable standing had at last been exorcised, that we did not even leave our spare rope fixed above, so as to help in a possible re-ascent of the crack.

From the ledge a downward slanting traverse carried us off the castle wall on to the raking precipices of the amphitheatre. I had difficulty in reminding myself that this immense recession had looked no more than a crease upon an insignificant frill of rock in our view from the green meadow, now lost in distance below our feet. The length of our traverse round the bottomless half-crater, and across to the foot of the depression upon the face of the Margherita, was probably three to four hundred feet. Our route wavered up and down. It crossed several incipient gulleys lined with unset concrete, and wound round the pediments of one or two excrescent buttresses. The rock was that which is reckoned as perpendicular for climbing purposes. The holds were gritty, generally loose and often non-existent. About half-way round we enjoyed—and we really did enjoy it—the 'hundred-foot hand-traverse.' For two portions of this, where we were clinging round rock contours upon which the ornamental chiselling had been scamped, we had to swing freely from hand to hand, with only an occasional and ungraceful protest of friction from our legs. On another part, where I stood on a ledge with my face against a sheer smooth wall, I found that I was expected to absorb myself into myself like india-rubber, and wilt subtly downward until my fingers could grip the beading between my toes, and so lower myself again to arm's length. This would not be an easy contortion, even on something as broad as a mantel-piece. On anything narrower, it is difficult to reconcile with any principle of balance. I forget the other details. The corrugations, or the dust, upon the slabs gave us hitches of ceremony for the rope. I saw nothing but the next cranny ; thought of nothing but its absence ; and felt little except that Josef's sack was growing heavier and heavier. I had my own theory about guides' sacks. The outposts of the hills have learned to use them as a sort of postal service, for exchanging their day-dreams : so ponderous do the contents of the sacks feel as we

pass from peak to peak ; so unsubstantial does our part in them look when we come to empty them out upon a summit. And the first thoughts of the yielding west ridge were heavy thoughts.

Across the last slabs of the traverse we raced on more complacent holds. We were at the base of the south-west wall of the Margherita, or rather at the point in the circuit at which that wall and our cliff-bay joined forces in a general descent upon Italy. The depression we had noted mounted the cliffs above us, mild and rugged and a haven to the eye. We shook off the rope ; fell into the shallow scoop as into an arm-chair—after that stark traverse—and rocked up it upon springs of soothing angles, each of us voluble upon his own line, and unmuted by even the shadow of a falling stone. The scoop gave out upon a hanging snow-shield under the lift of the summits. And there—we had no need to invent it, because it walked out at us round a corner—was a heart's desire of a chimney, narrow and lofty and deeply cut, and issuing dramatically upon the saddle between the double summits. It made for us a most stately finish ; and in its dignified way it recalled to us a score of homely British climbs. We bridged and serpentine up it appreciatively, and after a breathless and silent pause on the saddle, Josef and I passed on and up to erect a cairn on the west peak, in honour of this its first conquest, while Jones made directly for the higher summit, and photography.

So the link which many of us, and for many years, had been forging was now made ; and immediately, perverse as it may seem, I could feel only regret, the regret that treads upon the heels of gratified desire. The feeling is a familiar one : it belongs somewhere in every completed adventure. But on the Jorasses I felt it oppressively, a wave of grudging at our own success. The short pleasure in achievement, even before it had passed, seemed to be too dearly bought with the ending of a long hope. In the solitary triumph of one actual route had perished that happy family of ingenious courses which had enjoyed among us for years, in friendly rivalry and without prejudice to one another's chances, each its recurring moments of imaginary success. But then—finality is always disagreeable ; and there is nothing more fatal to fancy than an accomplished fact.

We joined H. O. upon the higher pinnacle of dark rock ; and started eastward upon our ridge again. This length of it had been already traversed three times, and report had advised us that it was better not to follow the edge, but to traverse below it along the north face. This was a mistake, I think ; and

certainly upon that day. The steep and tart rock-plats were tricky with snow. Some of the long downward traverses upon them were all that is most offensive and unstable. Loose chips frozen into the chinks provided such holds as there were. For the rest, we clawed and cramped, in the distrustful attitudes peculiar to semi-detached bodies. When we at last came up again on to the edge, and out into the sun, near the secondary peak known as the Punta Elena, it was with successive grunts of relief. I know I felt within myself a touch of the suspicion that 'everybody else is rather cross' which is a sure symptom of a relaxation in one's own nervous tension.

Soon afterwards we reached the point where an easy slope of loose rock down the southern wall of the ridge indicated the line by which the three previous ascents and descents had been made. H. O., very rightly considering that the new route had been completed, made ready to descend. I need not find reasons for what was a mere wish. But I had a wish to push on as far as one of the main summits beyond, and to connect up our traverses of the east and west ridges, so far, at least, as might not seem purely pedantic. We had not even to agree to differ: it was a very wordless and sensible form of debate. H. O. stood looking intently down the wall, and I as fixedly up the white crest of the arête. We both felt that there was so much to be said for the other's point of view that it would be unsociable to say anything for our own. In the harmonious issue, H. O. went on slowly ahead down the rocks, while Josef and I dropped the ropes and sacks, and fled like scared agile gibbons up the continuation of the ridge.

We had given ourselves forty-five minutes to reach the first snow peak. But in twenty-five we were panting on the summit. We took it to be the Pic Whympier, one of the Twins. But I have since thought that it must have been an adjacent summit, the culminating point of the Rocher Whympier, and that the peak which we looked upon as the Pic Walker, ten minutes up the snow edge beyond us, was in reality the Pic Whympier. It was sufficient, anyhow, to satisfy the whim for completeness. It was more. During the minutes I spent alone upon the small white cone in the sky before Josef overtook me, I slipped into one of those gaps in place and time where our single contemplation seems to lose itself in a consciousness of the larger life of all nature about us. I have never supposed these 'visionary' moments to be much more than bodily reactions. Common sense could not fail to see that they followed usually upon severe

muscular or nervous exercise. But they had the cleanly and tonic mental effect which belongs to all sincere emotion, from whatever material cause it may proceed. Moreover, the feeling that seizes upon us in the sight of such a view as extended earthward and seaward and heavenward around that summit of the Jorasses—combining the perfection of form achieved, or as sublimely missed, in the modelling of the ranges and glaciers of Mont Blanc with the wonder of contrasting colours spread in sunlight over the southern plains—is more than imaginative: it is curative and invigorating, physically. It is as though we can feel an old, and yet a new life flooding up to us from all the vast natural surfaces of form and colour and light which have ‘absorbed for centuries, unshielded, the energy of the sun in its strength.’

Within another twenty minutes we were back at our point of divergence, and shouting warnings to Jones, now a moving speck on the rocks below us, of our separate slithers down the débris of the rotten rib. We caught him up upon the edge of the Planpansière glacier, roped up, and marched with aching heads down the crevassed icefall, a slovenly and treacherous passage under the afternoon sun. The sight of the hut reminded us of the more rational despondency with which we had left it twelve hours before. It admonished us of the sense of satisfaction which we ought to be feeling; and then gave it to us in reality with a brew of hot tea.

The evening halt at the close of our actual climbing marks the right ending for a remembered day. Tea, and the last rest at the half-way hut, have cleared the brain grown dull with the changing pressure of different atmospheres, and are opening a way of escape in laughter out of the petulance of passing fatigue. We have still upon thought the impression of solitude and height. Commonplace ideas have had no time to enter. The romance of the day has not yet been resolved into a few stereotyped incidents. The incidents are still unmagnified and undistorted by question and repetition. On the other hand, we have broken the hypnotic rhythm of movement. Our purpose and our thoughts are released from their long and single concentration. We are in a state of indulgent transition. And this ease of mind and freedom of movement are preparing us agreeably, by a restful commune with slower and gentler sensations and by the wandering attention which a safer footing encourages, for the pleasant trifling of the levels we are nearing, where we shall move once again at the call of convention and

the clock, and no longer to the undertones of chance and death and measureless time.

Already the quick exultation and the more lasting regret with which we looked down from our conquered peak, or back along the broken enchantment of the ridge, are forgotten. The free summits are again above us, as challenging and as remote. Each trenchant outline no more than hints at the memory of some secret place of contest. Each shadowy plane is invested once again with the glamour of seclusion and inaccessibility. We might return, and we might prevail a second time. But it must be now with no less effort and with no less uncertainty than before. Even while we are still within the measure of our victorious day, we realize that we have already surrendered the few hours of success which we borrowed from an existence as mutable as our own. Could we repeat our ascent, the rocks would not be the same rocks, as we should not be the same men. Rock and wind and weather-defences, and strength and mood and fortune, can never be matched twice under the same conditions of conflict. Among mountains, to-day's victory is no pledge of to-morrow's success.

While we watched from the hut, the great twin ridges of the Jorasses, east and west, were already brightening under the sunset with a new armour of frost, and noisily shaping fresh rock escarpments for the confusion of other explorers. For us also in any later season theirs would be a new defiance, as incalculable and as magical as the old. Their distant splendour, the same in seeming and yet never twice the same in experience, must gain rather than lose from any recollection we might keep of its once formidable proximity and of our brief moment of possession. There is a charm in revisiting, with curious and different minds, the places or the story-books we knew in childhood, and of which we have preserved in memory sun-coloured and mysterious images and echoes unlike all our later impressions. The mountain we once have climbed recalls us afterwards with much the same imaginative persistence, but with an even stronger appeal. For the spell of our friendship with it was woven, not out of the fancies of childhood, but through and across some of the most intense, most durable impressions of our conscious manhood. Our later and subdued selves may wonder, in absence, that any lifeless object could ever have meant so much to us. But we have only to see the mountain again, or to catch its image in a clear memory, and instantly the spell is renewed. We feel again all that we once felt. The mountain

looks again all that it once seemed. It is alive with every detail of our past intimacy, with every feature of its own beauty and danger, with every instant of the fantastic chase, the fitful triumph, the elusive and for all time uncapturable pleasure we once dreamed of in its company.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEMORY OF THE MISCHABEL

Let him who seeks the monarchs of our quest
challenge their wakened might,
his diadem
wrested from summits crowned with summer light.
Not his to tempt their rest
when winter rigours and cold snows encumber :—
the sleeping ones have but to stir in slumber,
and he shall sleep with them.

“**T**IME and fair weather are apt to prove fatal to most alpine estimates.” But the years have passed, and the south face of the Täschhorn stares at me across the interval, a height and depth of sensation un-reduced by a longer perspective and unobscured even by the ranges of emotion traversed during the excitement and the depressions of the war.

But the war years have produced one slight, perhaps temporary change. In difficult or dangerous undertakings men of action have always had to take ‘nerves’—their own or their company’s—very thoroughly into consideration; but it was thought indelicate to allude to them publicly, in forecast or reminiscence. It is now conceded that they may form a necessary part of the natural of a man, not inconsistent with manliness or even with heroism. The story, therefore, of the Täschhorn climb can now be told with less likelihood of seeming to do an injustice to the gallantry and endurance of our company of the day. For one reason especially I am glad of the new licence. Franz Lochmatter’s mountaineering feat was the greatest I have witnessed, and after a number of years I can still say the greatest I can imagine. It is right that it should be recorded; for I do not suppose that in its mastery of natural difficulty, in its resistance to the effects of cold and fatigue and to the infections of depression and fear, it has often been equalled on any field of adventure or conflict.

After this exordium—the story will probably read very

flat. Our own feeling is the light by which we see a scene. We know, afterwards, what our own feeling was, and we can rekindle it for ourselves. But we cannot reproduce the feeling in words simultaneously with the description of the incidents which produced it, and which were seen by us only as reflected in its light.

I have confessed to a period when it seemed that the early romance of alpine climbing could best be recaptured by inventing novel routes up the great peaks; and have mentioned that this occasionally brought me across the path of that comet of the Alps, V. J. E. Ryan, and Josef and Franz Lochmatter. Into their tail—if they had one—little Josef Knubel and I were willingly swept, in somewhat irregular conjunction. So long as there was no danger, in the mountain sense, we all climbed unroped. In a danger-zone we grouped as a trio and a duet working independently. But where, as sometimes happened, there was no safe holding for any member of the party of three or the party of two, we joined up our ropes. There are few mountain passages which do not allow of good holds for at least one member of a party of five spaced out along four hundred feet of rope. Since upon this plan it was usually possible for several of us to be moving simultaneously, we gained the extra security which a span of five men can give, and climbed almost as quickly as a rope of three.

We had decided from the top of the Weisshorn opposite that the Täschhorn from the south could be climbed. I based my opinion on what I used flippantly to call *prima facie* evidence: every south 'face' must have a route up it, and all the better if we were the 'first.' Ryan had sounder advices: he had looked down the wall itself from above. There are two couloirs up the face, which, as they approach the pyramidal summit, fork out to left and right on to the western and south-eastern ridges. The final diamond of precipice which they thus enclose we thought, as we examined it from Zermatt, might prove the ace of trumps against us. But we could possibly cut out, by the couloirs, on to either ridge; and as it lay with us to lead off, we were safe in opening the game with a high heart.

We idled up to the luxury of a night at the Täschalp. A first grey dawn of mist, mizzling and 'lowand,' whose drench freezing at higher levels was responsible for much of our later trouble upon the peak, we spent in a false start up the wet grass slopes, and in a cheerful return down them again, to a

day of chess and wild-raspberry jam. Our second start was in an earlier darkness; and we came up among the snow levels, to meet a colder, clearer grey light glimmering ominously from ice-frore and snow-fleck on the high peaks. We sprinted up the north bay of the Weingarten glacier, to its snow rim under the south face.

To this, our first near view of the cliffs, their fore-shortening, and the cunning lie of the strata, gave a most deceitful impression of their brevity and retrogression, and of their darkling innocence of snow. One prophet murmured of the top at half-past nine; another conceded until mid-day. But the great central chimney up the face, although clear of any traces of stone-fall, we had at once to reject from among our alternative lines. It was festooned and freakishly upholstered with ice, and a frash of new snow on its corbels gave me a qualm of doubt as to all that might be lying hidden on the less visible belts of the face.

A steep but plausible buttress on the west of the chimney was our unanimous choice. It mounted genially out of the glacier, and gave us all we could wish of erect furrow and rib, with wrinkle holds of the Welsh cliff pattern. Higher up we began to find that the ledges sloped wrong, and that each rock tilt, as it became visible, held a white plastering of snow. I have a recollection of an ill-looking crooked funnel, upright and bitten into the nose of the buttress, with its snowy lining dark-dappled and smirched by the up-wriggling of my predecessors, where I first suggested to little J., who was climbing below me, that convention suggested our roping together. And, later, there follow several flash-light records of Franz' brown face—he was climbing last of the trio ahead—looking down at me pensively: his fashion of expressing a more vocal guide's "How goes it?" or "What about a rope to help here?"

Higher again, I was not disinclined to use a spare rope, fixed and considerately left behind for me in a glaciated and knobbly perpendicular groove; and not far above this we all collected for breakfast on a relenting, snow-laden rock bracket, which projected over the emptiness of the great chimney on the east of our buttress. It was half-past seven; and this halt—a chilly standing and a swallowing of food from frozen mittens—proved to be our last 'rest' or convenient platform of assembly during the whole ascent. Above us the buttress merged into the face. Against the sky overhead, the snow fringe, upon the crest of the west ridge, caught the sunlight and looked very near. Between



Teufelsgrat

TÄSCHHORN
Southern Face

Dom

the two, the rock terraces, slanting upward across the face to the east, leaned back promisingly. We were only gradually to discover that each lift of the smooth friable rock was surmounted by no gratifying shelf, but by a rounded glacis, steep and slippery and holdless, vexed with snow, and sliding up against the sheer rise of the following step.

But already at intervals, as we climbed on again, there came to me from above and below atmospheric hints of that depression in the guides' humour which often warns us, through the instinct of the best of the hill-men, that there is grave work in prospect even before their eyes have discovered it. Ryan was, however, as always, bent upon the immediate 'forward'; and his imperious staccato sentences, as little modified as his own fearlessness by any hush of breathless circumstance, had their usual effect upon his high-mettled team.

The buttress slid us stealthily up, and out on to the cliffs. The cliff-terraces drew us insidiously up and on. I soon forgot any atmospheric warnings in the exhilaration of clinging up smooth facet after smooth facet of rock, and of crawling and hand-pressing up the disappointing shelves, sloped like desk-lids, which joined steep to steep. I was not concerned with 'stances,' such as would allow me to stop and anchor our rope. Where I could go, little J. could more than follow safely; and surely the next shelf must be as level as it looked from below? Meanwhile, I was only intent to keep our duet up to the tremendous pace set by the trio ahead.

There is nothing lulls a leader's judgment more fatally to sleep than another party, or even a man 'off the rope,' climbing ahead of him. The task of settling *whether* or not to proceed is taken from him. He has only to think *how* to pass where another has already gone. If little J. and I had been climbing by our cautious selves we should, I think, have begun to doubt much sooner whether we would find it wholesome to descend all that we were grappling up so confidently. As it was, although a separate, we were no longer a responsible unit; and the strength of a climbing party is its collective, self-contained discretion. My own attention was bobbing ahead, concerned chiefly with the growing interval between myself and the speedy rhythm of the trio above me. They also were probably in much the same case. The presence of a cheerful amateur, similarly out of touch with the unison and 'feeling' of their rope and rattling tin-cannily if always more distantly at their heels, may have had a good deal to say to Josef Lochmatter's pushing on, until well

beyond the time when his better judgment would have perceived the risk of what we were doing and all that it threatened in the event of our retreat. It may well be so. But then again what was there, upward, downward, or across in the mountain world, which Josef, Franz, and Ryan might not justifiably have attempted, and confidently have faced as a return?

I began to notice that the trio, dotted up the diagonal markings on the grey face above, were pausing from time to time, as if to wait for us. This spurred me on the more. About the same time that recording angel, sensation, signalled to me that I was wrestling up the steepening walls and their lean-to roofs more awkwardly and slowly. Experience teaches us early to distinguish between the causes that may produce this feeling; and I was able to assign it now to the fact that the class of difficulty was getting beyond me, and not to a fluctuation in my own 'standard of the day.'

The precipices beetled their brows always more harshly over us. They restricted us more and more to lines of treacherous diagonal traverse, upward to the right and along the trend of the strata towards the central chimney. Traversing up these orbic, slithery bands without a vestige of good hold was no work for a rope of two. Little J., even if he went ahead, could be of no more protection to me than I was to him. But, imperceptibly still, the promise of a better stance above the next wall, and again above the next wall, each ending in disappointment, led us up and on. It was an optical illusion familiar in design. The gentler lateral inclination of the rock bands continued to lead the eye astray. They prevented it from appreciating the actual, and exceptional, steepness of the precipice, to which we were now all too deeply committed.

Ryan called back to me, to suggest that I should rope on behind Franz, in our usual fashion for danger-zones. I believe this to have been his generous reply to a suggestion made to him about this time that the trio ought to try and push ahead, while little J. and I should be advised to make our own way down. I recall the incident merely to indicate how doubtful already seemed the prospect of a successful issue, and how far the peculiar method which we followed, of separate ropes—so successful on other occasions, but so dangerous on this owing to the insidious character of the climbing—had already succeeded in hustling our mountaineering discretion.

Reassured by the pleasant moral of Franz' rope, the more agreeable for its rarity, I found the immediate business of not

falling off the planes of traverse less preoccupying. It is an illustration of the psychic value of the rope, that we were no sooner united by it physically than I began to be more sensible of the nervous depression which had long been gathering in the lead ; although, spatially, we were in no closer touch than before. I felt it to the extent at least of realizing that the element of cheerfulness, the oxygen of a confident climbing atmosphere, needed replenishing.

The day was still bright and young, and the men obviously in fine climbing form. It was, therefore, no effort to telephone hearty remarks up and down the rope, or to emerge at Franz' feet after each struggle with a breathless but honest grin. But still the cliffs leaned out at us ; still the unchancy upward and sideways traversing was forced upon us. A little cloud of anxiety crept upon the edge of my mind. My eye glanced unwillingly up or down : it was beginning to dodge, instinctively, the questions that the sight suggested. Our hands and feet grew gradually numb with the uninterrupted clinging to rounded, cold and slippery ledges.

At last—and how vividly the scene starts to mind—I stood on such a shelf, looking up at Franz' head and shoulders as he poised over a sheer wall above me, his prehensile feet balancing him erect upon a gutter-slope whose gracelessness I was yet to discover. The wall up to him bothered me a little, and as I got one arm over the coping and felt only the comfortless incline of the narrow band, I called out in joking patois, " Watch out, Franz, for my rope ! " He looked down at me and out beyond me thoughtfully, almost abstractedly, without the customary flash of big brown eyes and big white teeth : " You must do what you can ; *here* we can no longer help one another ! " And then he turned away, dropping my rope symbolically from his hand and watching his brother, whose struggles, invisible to me, were audible far up round a black, repulsive corner.

From such a man the words had the effect of an icy douche. The detachment of mind which a leader may never lose whatever his occupation with his own struggles returned upon the instant. I looked down over my arm : to see the deadly continuity of descending precipice with its narrow snowy eavelets leaning out one above another, and still one above another, dizzily ; and seeming to shrug even the glance of my eye off into space. And I realized in a flash what a return down them must mean. I looked up ; to discover that worse lay before us, if we failed to force a way up the chimney into which we were

traversing for an escape. For hours already, deceived by our spacing from each other up a seeming ladder of terraces that were no terraces, we must have been climbing in reality at our several risks: each of us unprotected by the man above: the slip of any one imperilling the rest. For how many more hours would this, or could we, continue?

A slight, pricking snow began to drift across us. From the exposed height of our great pyramidal wall, surging above other ranges, we looked out across a frozen and unheeding stillness of white peak and glacier, disappearing under darker clouds to the south. We seemed very much removed from the earth, and very much alone. As I turned back to the rock I could see nothing but antagonism in the ice-wrinkled face of the crags upon which we were venturing; and I had the feeling—it was too formless at the time to take the definite shape I must now give to it—as if somewhere low down beyond the horizon behind me a great grey bird was just lifting on its wings into heavy flight. As the hours wore on, this shadow at our backs seemed to be approaching soundlessly and covering more and more of the sky. Gradually it was enclosing us within its spread of cold wings, and isolating us from all the world of life and movement in our contest with the frigid wall of grey precipice.

Precariously we crawled up to and along, and up to and along the sloping ribbons, silky with chill snow, and leading interruptedly upward towards the projecting corner which shut us off from the big couloir. On the decrepit mantelpiece by which we turned the corner itself, we could use a rock 'hitch' for the rope, one of the only three we found on all this upper face! We edged round into the couloir, a forbidding chasm; and found ourselves on a slim, shattered ledge, that continued inwards at a high level across the sheer wall of rock forming our side of the rift.

We were more or less together now; and no one could any longer pretend that some one above saw a gleam of hope denied to himself. Forty feet below, the slabby back of the chasm slanted steeply outward, and down into space. Past us, the same backing of slabs mounted precipitously, to splay out in an amphitheatre of over-leaning walls far above. And every hopeless curve of slab was glassy with ice and glitter-film. The couloir, as an upward escape, needed no second glance. Josef was already clinging down our wall into the chasm below. His object was plain. The same belt or flaw by which we had entered the rift appeared again, at a lower level, upon the wall opposite

to us, and disappeared round the profile of the further containing buttress. What could be seen of its re-start was no more than a sloping shelf, that wound steeply upwards and out of sight round the all but vertical corner. But Josef had evidently made up his mind that our only chance, now the couloir had failed, was to resume our perilous ribbon-traverses along the bands; in the hope—if they continued far enough—of finding the second, smaller chimney, the branch which forked out on to the south-east ridge, accessible; and if accessible, less icy-hearted. It appeared to me, and probably to him, a very faint and rather fearsome chance. Even the slabs below us, which gave difficult access to the crazy re-start of the traverse, looked villainous enough.

Was there no alternative? Far above us on our right, and above the vanishing top of the hopeless couloir, I could see the snow crest of the west ridge slanting down the sky, as it descended steeply from the peak. That part of the crest looked very remote; and there was no way to it. But in a direct line above our ledge, since the west ridge descended very rapidly, our wall must surely be meeting the crest at no such very great height above us? Stuck like stamp-paper as we were on to the wall, it was impossible for us to see more than a short initial overhang, then twenty feet of rock almost sheer but bristly as a clothes-brush, and above that a silvery fringe of snow which *must* mean some set-back in the angle of the cliff. It seemed to me certainly worth trying, and far shorter, if it would go! Franz waved it aside without comment. Little J. gave it longer consideration; but he was away along the ledge, and could not count. Josef was already more than occupied with the slabs below us, and, therefore, not to be distracted. But I still think it might have proved the less desperate alternative.

Josef moved tentatively about on the smooth shoot of the slabs, steadied by Ryan with the rope from our ledge. He never looked like crossing them; and I think that the nearer view of the re-start of the traverse was weakening his resolution. The dark chilly depths of the chasm gave muffled answer to his agitated comments. Franz, beside me on the ledge, watched him, hissing a gay little French song between his teeth, the only sign of excitement I have ever known him show. Then—"It won't go!" came in a hollow shout from below; and—"But it *must* go!" echoed from Franz, who at once leaped into action. I untied my rope to him. He was down and out on to the slabs in a breath, still singing to himself. He caterpillared his way

across the ice-bosses above Josef. Josef, and other great guides, on slabs moved with the free poise of an athlete and the foot-cling of a chamois. Franz, in such case, had the habit and something of the appearance of a spider or crustacean. His curled head disappeared altogether. His body and square shoulders split and elongated into four steely tentacles, radiating from a small central core or hub of intelligence, which transmitted the messages between his tiny hands and boots as they clung attached and writhing at phenomenal angles and distances.

At the far side of the slabs he crawled on to and up the sloping shelf of the disappearing traverse, only keeping himself on it, so far as could be seen, by thrusting one foot firmly out against the aether. Presently Ryan followed, out of sight; and then Josef. Even with little J. playing my rope from high up on the wall behind me, I found the crossing of the iced slabs of the couloir upon a descending diagonal nasty enough. More especially towards the farther side, when the rope, sagging across from above, began to pull me back with a heavy draw. But the start of the traverse looked unspeakable. A downward and outward leaning shelf, with nothing below and an overhanging wall above, it screwed steeply upward out of sight round the buttress. From far up along it came Josef's voice, thinly crying caution. How was I to keep on the shelf—and, much more, wriggle up it?

Little J. joined me on the ice-nicks in the slabs; and after many attempts the end of Josef's rope, slung from above and weighted with a stone, was lassoed back and round to a point on the slabs from which we could recover it. I tied on, and started. Once up on the shelf, I found that there was nothing to keep me on it against the urgency of the slant into space. A hailing match between little J. and Josef only produced the information that while he was 'good' to hold—but not to pull—along the diagonal upward line of the shelf, he would be helpless against any direct downward strain, such as must result if I fell off the shelf. There was nothing for it but to thrust myself desperately upward, relying only upon the friction of my outer knee on the hem of the sloping ribbon to resist an outward drag to which the weight of the world seemed to be added. Of service, also, were two or three painful finger-tip pinches on the down-sloping prickles of the wall above my head.

When I reached Josef, I found him sprawled over rugosities on the buttress. His 'hitch'—the second of our dauntless three—was no more than a prong of rock sticking downward like a

tusk from the overhang above him, and of course useless against a pull from any but the one, sideways, direction. Little J., who had by now begun his assorted collection of all our sacks and axes, followed up magnificently.

I have no clear recollection of the series of traverses up and across the face that followed. After a short easier interval, they became, if anything, more steeply inclined and more outward sloping than before. The snow on them grew slimier and colder, the day darker, the sprinkling pepper of snowfall denser and keener. Hands and feet grew lifeless and lost their touch; and there was never a single sound holding-ledge for any one of the party. We began that monotonous beat of any unoccupied toe or hand against the rock which alone kept the blood in circulation during the long cold hours of halt and fight and creep, and creep and fight and halt. On the next day my own toes and finger-tips were bruised blue—though I had felt no pain at the time; and a few fingers still retain the lowered vitality that follows on frost-bite. But during the climb no lesser trouble could get its head above the dark tide of oppression which filled all the spaces of consciousness. The fight went on doggedly, with that determination to take no long views but to make just the next hold good and the one more step secure, which enables a human atom to achieve such heights of effort and to disregard such lengths of suffering.

The next clear memory is of finding ourselves inside the second, smaller, chimney, a precipitous narrow cleft up the face, of worn, skull-smooth rock. It was all dirty white and bone-blue in the gloomy afternoon light, with blurred ice-nubbles bulking through the adhesive snow. But at least there was the singular rest for eye and nerves which the feeling of enclosing walls gives us after long hours on an exposed cliff. We even found a nominal stance or two, in ice-pockets on chockstones, where we could *almost* hold on without help from the hands. Franz, who was back again above me resting from the lead, could spare me a few partial hoists with the rope. I began to feel my muscles slackening with the relief, and I became conscious of the cold. I had time to notice that I was climbing less precisely, a symptom of relaxed tension: time, too, to admit ungrudgingly that nothing in the universe but Franz' rope could have got me up to and over some of the expulsive ice bulges in the chimney. Ignorant in my remote position of what the front men saw awaiting us above, I even thawed into a congratulatory remark or so; but I drew no response.

And then, it all ended ! The chimney simply petered out : not under the south-east ridge, as we might have hoped, but in the very hard heart of the diamond precipice some six hundred feet below the final and still invisible summit. The vague exit from the chimney faded out against the base of a blank cliff. One of its side walls led on for a little, and up to the left. There it too vanished, under the lower rim of a big snowy slab, sloping up, and slightly conical, like a dish-cover. I have reason to remember that slab. It formed the repellent floor of a lofty, triangular recess. On its left side, and in front, there was space and ourselves. On its right, and at the back, a smooth leap of colossal cliff towered up for a hundred feet of crystallized shadow, and then arched out above our heads in a curve like the dark underside of a cathedral dome. A more appalling-looking finish to our grim battle of ascent could hardly have been dreamed in a ' falling ' nightmare ; and we had not even standing room to appreciate it worthily ! As I looked up and then down, I had an overpowering sense of the great grey wings behind us, shadowing suddenly close across the whole breadth of precipice, and folding us off finally from the world.

But our long apprenticeship to discouragement stood us in good stead. Muscles braced anew obstinately ; determination quickened resentfully. The recess on whose lip we hung had been formed by the sliding of a great wedge of rock off the inclined, dish-cover slab, once its bed. But on our right the cliff continued the original line. My impression of this, therefore, was as of a high building viewed from under one corner. Its sheer front wall stretched away to the right, flush with the sill of our slab. The end wall of the building formed the right side of our recess, and overhung the slab. The rectangular house-corner, where the two walls joined, rose immediately above us, vertical and iced, but a little chipped by the rending out of the wedge. Again, the front wall of this projecting house did not rise to the same height as the cliff that backed our recess. Forty feet up—my measures are merely impressions—the wall slanted steeply back in a roof, receding out of sight. Presumably another huge wedge had here slid from its bed, on a higher plane. Above and beyond this roof the precipices rose again into sight, in the same line and of the same height as the cliffs which backed our recess. Only, the cliff vertically above us was crowned by the great dome or overhang. There must be, therefore, invisible above, some rough junction or flaw where the line of cliffs above the receding house-roof linked on to the forward jut of our dome.

Four vital questions suggested themselves: Could the house-corner be climbed? Was the roof, if attainable, too steep to crawl up? Might there be a flawed connexion where the precipice upon which the roof abutted joined on to the side of the dome? If there was such a flaw, would this yield us a passage out on to the face of the convex dome *above* its circle of largest dimension, on its retreating upper curve, or *below* it, under its hopeless arch? These details are tiresome, perhaps unintelligible. But they may help other climbers to a better understanding of Franz' remarkable feat.

Right up in the angle of the recess there was a rotund blister of rock modelled in low relief on the face of the slab; and round this a man, hunched on small nicks in the steep surface, could just belay the rope. Josef and Franz were crouching at this blister up in the recess. The rest of us were dispersed over freezing cling-holds along the lower rim of the slab. And the debate proceeded, broken by gusts of snow. The man to lead had clearly to run out a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet of rope. He could be given no protection. His most doubtful link would come some eighty feet up, above the roof. If he found a flaw there, and it served him favourably, he would be out on the convex of the dome fully a hundred feet above us, and outside us in a direct line above our heads. If, at this point, he could not proceed—well, it was equally unlikely that he could return!

Franz showed no hesitation. The hampered preparations for the attempt went on hurriedly. We had all to unrope as best we could, so as to arrange for the two hundred feet of possible run-out, and we hooked on to our holds with difficulty, while the snow-frozen rope kinked and banged venomously about us. In the end little J. and I had to remain off the rope, to leave enough free. Then—

as a flame
Stirred by the air, under a cavern gaunt—

Franz started up the corner, climbing with extraordinary nerve but advancing almost imperceptibly. It was much like swarming up the angle of a tower, rough-cast with ice. Ryan and little J. crept up near the blister; but as there was no more room I remained hanging on to the fractured sill of the slab. In this position I was farther out; and I could just see Franz' two feet scratting desperately for hold to propel him up the tilt of the roof above the corner. The rest of him was now out of sight.

The minutes crawled like hours, and the rope hanging down to us over the gable-end hardly seemed to stir upwards. The snow gusts distracted us cruelly. A precipice in sunshine seems at least interested in our microscopic efforts. Its tranquillity even helps our movement by giving to it a conspicuous importance. But when the stable and the unstable forces of nature join in one of their ferocious, inconclusive conflicts, the little human struggle is carelessly swallowed up in uproar, and tosses unregarded and morally deflated, like a wet straw on a volcanic wave.

Suddenly I heard that unmistakable scrape and grit of sliding boot-nails and clothes. Above my head, over the edge of the roof to the right, I saw Franz' legs shoot out into space. Time stopped. A shiver, like expectancy, trembled across the feeling of unseen grey wings behind me, from end to end of the cliff. I realized impassively that the swirl of the rope must sweep me from my holds before it tightened on the doubtful belay of the blister. But fate was playing out the game in regions curiously remote. My mind watched the moves, itself absorbed into the same remote, dispassionate atmosphere. It seemed unwilling to disturb the issue by formulating a thought, or even a fear. The fact of the body seemed negligible; it had no part in the observant aloofness into which all consciousness had withdrawn. Something of the same feeling of separation between the body and the watching mind is the experience of men actually falling or drowning, when action is at an end and there is not even pain to reunite bodily and mental sensation. But during the crises of this day the condition lasted, with me certainly, for spaces that could only be measured by hours.

Franz' boots again disappeared above the edge. No one in the recess had known of the slip, out of their sight and lost in the gusts. He had stopped himself miraculously on the rim by crushing his hands on to ice-dimples in the slab. The hanging rope began again to travel up along the slanting gable-end of the roof. There was a long interval, and now and then the sound of a scratting boot or the scrabble of loose surface. Then the rope began, jerkily, to work out and across far above our heads. Franz had found a flaw in the join of the cliffs above the roof, and he was creeping out on to the projection of the dome. The lengthening rope now hung down well *outside* the men in the recess, and it might have hung outside me on the lower rim, had they not held in its end. Its weight upon Franz, as it swayed down through the snow, must have added to his

immense difficulties. He was well out of sight, clinging somewhere above on the upper curve of the overhang.

An indistinct exchange of shouts began, half swallowed by echo, wind, and snow. Franz, it appeared, was still quite uncertain if he could get up any further. For the time he could hold on well enough to help one man with the rope; but he had not two hands free to pull. I could hear his little spurt of laughter at the question—"Could he return?" He suggested that Josef should join him, and the rest wait until they two might return with a rescue-party. Wait, there!—for at best fifteen hours, hanging on to the icy holds, in a snow wind! Well, then, what if we four tried to get down, and he would go on alone—if he could? "Get down? Ho, la, la!"—Josef was at his resourceful wits' end. I suggested, pacifyingly, that Ryan might join and reinforce Franz, and that we remaining three could attempt the descent together. This provoked the crisis, which had been long threatening. Josef's competence and control were second to none in the Alps; but the responsibility, the physical strain, and this last disappointment had overstrained the cord. It snapped; and in somewhat disconcerting fashion.

Harsh experience can teach us that when these accidie occur, as they may to the most courageous of men if tested unfairly, the only remedy is to soothe or to startle. The first was impracticable in our situation. I spoke sharply in reproach, but without raising my voice. The experiment succeeded surprisingly. Self-control returned upon the instant, and for the rest of the day Josef climbed and safeguarded us with all his own superb skill and chivalrous consideration.

He was right in so far that, at that hour of the day and upon those treacherous cliffs, now doubly dangerous under accumulating snow, all the odds were against any of us who turned back getting down alive. Franz in any case could not get back to us, and he might not be able to advance. We were committed, therefore, to the attempt to join him, however gloomy its outlook. As many as possible must be got up to him—and the rest must be left to chance.

Josef started his attempts on the corner. This left room for me to move up to Ryan on the slab. He asked me, I remember, what I thought were the chances of our escape. I remember, too, considering it seriously, and I can hear myself answering—"About one in five." As we talked fragmentarily, and listened to the distant scraping of Josef's feet up the roof, I recalled—

with a grim appreciation of this new, first-hand example—having often remarked in the stories of shipwreck or other catastrophe how inevitably and usefully the 'educated' man plays up to the occasion. For the audience of his own mind as much as for anybody else he sustains almost unconsciously the part which his training imposes upon him as alone consistent with his self-respect.

The end of the long rope hooted down past us. It hung outside the recess, dangling in air; and I could only recover it by climbing down again over the rim of the slab and reaching out for it one-handed with my axe. I passed it up; and then I stayed there, hanging on, because I could no longer trust hands or feet to get me up the slope again. Ryan began the corner; but if I have described the position at all intelligibly, it will be seen that while the corner rose vertically on our right, the long rope hung down on a parallel line from the dome directly above our heads. So it came that the higher we climbed up the corner the more horizontal became the slanting pull of the rope, and the more it tended to drag us sideways off the corner and back under the overhang. Very coolly, Ryan shouted a warning before he started of the insufficient power left in frozen hands. Some twenty feet up, the rope tore him from his inadequate, snowy holds. He swung across above our heads and hung suspended in mid-air. The rope was fixed round his chest. In a minute it began to suffocate him. He shouted once or twice to the men above to hurry. Then a fainter call, "I'm done," and he dangled to all appearance unconscious on the rope. Franz and Josef could only lift him half-inch by half-inch. For all this hour—probably it was longer—they were clamped one above the other on to the steep face of the dome, their feet on shallow but sound nicks, one hand clinging on, and only the other free to pull in. Any inch the one lifted, the other held. The rough curve of the rock, over which the higher portion of the rope descended, diminished by friction the effectiveness of each tug. The more one considers their situation, the more superhuman do the co-operation and power the two men displayed during this time, at the end of all those hours of effort, appear. Little J. and I had only the deadly anxiety of watching helplessly, staring upward into the dizzy snow and shadow: and that was enough. J. had followed silently and unselfishly the whole day; and even now he said nothing: crouching in unquestioning endurance beside the freezing blister on the slab.

Ryan was up at last, somehow, to the overhang; and being dragged up the rough curve above. A few small splinters were loosened, and fell, piping, past me and on to me. I remember calculating apathetically whether it was a greater risk to try and climb up again into the recess, unroped and without any feel in fingers and toes, or to stay where I was, hanging on to the sill, and chance being knocked off by a stone. It is significant of the condition of body and mind that I decided to stay where I was, where at least stiffened muscles and joints still availed to hold me mechanically fixed on to my group of rounded nicks.

Ryan was now out of sight and with the others. When the constriction of the rope was removed he must have recovered amazingly toughly, and at once; for down once more, after a short but anxious pause, whistled the snow-stiffened rope, so narrowly missing me that little J. cried out in alarm. I could not for a time hook it in with the axe; and while I stretched, frigidly and nervously, Josef hailed me from seemingly infinite height, his shouts travelling out on the snow eddies. They could not *possibly* pull up my greater weight. Unless I felt sure I could stick on to the corner and manage to climb round to them by Franz' route, it was useless my trying! At last I had fished in the rope, with a thrill of relief, and I set mental teeth. With those two tied on to the rope above, and myself tied on—in the way I meant to tie myself on—to the rope below, there were going to be no more single options. We were all in it together; and if I had still some faith in myself I had yet more in that margin of desperation strength which extends the possible indefinitely for such men as I knew to be linked on to me above. And if I were once up, well, there would be no question after that about little J. coming up too!

I gave hands and feet a last blue-beating against the rock to restore some feeling to them. Then I knotted the rope round my chest, made the loose end into a triple-bowline 'chair' round the thighs, and began scratching rather futilely up the icy rectangular corner. For the first twenty-five feet—or was it much less?—I could just force upward. Then the rope began to drag me off inexorably. I clutched furiously up a few feet more; and then I felt I must let go, the drag was too strong for frozen fingers. As I had already resolved, at the last second I kicked off from the rock with all my strength. This sent me flying out on the rope, and across under the overhang, as if attached to a crazy pendulum. I could see J. crouch-

ing in the recess far below, instinctively protecting his head. The impetus jumped the upper part of the rope off its cling to the rock face of the dome above, and enabled the men to snatch in a foot or two. The return-swing brought me back, as I had half hoped, against the corner, a little higher up. I gripped it with fingers and teeth, and scrambled up another few feet. But the draw was now irresistible. I kicked off again; gained a foot or so, and spun back.

I was now up the corner proper, and I should have been by rights scrambling up the roof on the far side of my gable edge. But the rope, if nothing else, prevented any chance of my forcing myself over it and farther to the right. Another cling and scratch up the gable end, and I was not far below the level of the dome overhanging above and to my left. For the last time I fell off. This time the free length of the rope, below its hold upon the curve of the dome, was too short to allow of any return swing. So I shot out passively, to hang, revolving slowly, under the dome, with the feeling that my part was at an end. When I spun round inward, I looked up at the reddish, scarred wall freckled with snow, and at the tense rope, looking thin as a grey cobweb and disappearing frailly over the forespring of rock that arched greedily over my head. When I spun outward, I looked down—no matter how many thousand feet—to the dim, shifting lines of the glacier at the foot of the peak, hazy through the snowfall; and I could see, well inside my feet, upon the dark face of the precipice the little blanched triangle of the recess and the duller white dot of J.'s face as he crouched by the blister. It flashed across me, absurdly, that he ought to be more anxious about the effect of my gymnastics upon the fragile thread of alpine rope, his one link with hope, than about me!

I was quite comfortable in the chair; but the spinning had to be stopped. I reached out the axe at full stretch, and succeeded in touching the cliff, back under the overhang. This stopped me, face inward. I heard inarticulate shouting above, and guessed its meaning, although I was now too close under the dome to catch the words:—'They could not lift my dead weight!' I bethought me, and stretched out the axe again; got its point against a wrinkle of the wall, and pushed out. This started me swinging straight out and in below the dome. After two pokes I swung in near enough to be able to give a violent, short-armed thrust against the cliff. It carried me out far enough to jump quite a number of feet of rope clear

of its cling down the rock above. The guides took advantage of the easing to haul in, and I pendulum'd back a good foot higher. The cliff facing me was now beginning to spring out in the Gothic arch of the overhang; so it could be reached more easily. I repeated the shove-out more desperately. Again they hauled in on the released rope. This time I came back close under the arch; and choosing a spot as I swung in, I lifted both feet, struck them at the wall, and gave a convulsive upward and outward spring. The rope shortened up; and as I banged back the cornice of the arch loomed very near above my head. But the free length of rope below it was now too short to let me again reach to the back of the arch with leg or axe. I hung, trying in vain to touch the lowest moulding of the cornice above with my hands. I heard gasps and grunts above quite distinctly now. The rope strained and creaked, gritting over the edge of the rock above me. I felt the tremor of the sinews heaving on it. But for all that, I did not move up. I reached up with the axe in both hands, just hooked the pick into a lucky chink of the under-moulding, and pulled, with a frantic wriggle of the whole body. It was a feeble lift, but enough for the sons of Anak above to convert into a valuable gain. The axe slipped down on to my shoulder, held there by its sling. I reached up and back with both arms, got hold of a finger-grip, and gained another inch. Infinitesimal inches they seemed, each a supreme effort, until my nose and chin scratched up against a fillet of the cornice. Then the arms gave out completely, so much at the end of their strength that they dropped lifeless. But the teeth of the upper jaw held on a broken spillikin and, with the stronger succour of the rope, supported me for the seconds while the blood was running back into my arms.

Wrestle by wrestle it went on. Every reserve of force seemed exhausted, but the impulse was now supplied by a flicker of hope. Until, at last, I felt my knee catch over a moulding on the edge, and I could sink forward for an instant's rest, with rucked clothes clinging over the rough, steep, upward but *backward* curving of the dome. It is impossible to suggest the relief of that feeling, the proof that the only solid surface which still kept me in touch with existence had ceased to thrust itself out for ever as a barrier overhead, and was actually giving back below me in semi-support.

But there was no time, or inclination, to indulge panting humanity with a rest or a realization. I crept up a few feet, on to small, brittle, but sufficient crinkles. The dark figures

of the three men above were visible now, clinging crab-like and exhausted on to similar nicks, indistinct in the snow dusk, but still human company. I had to stay where I was, and untie my rope, knotting up a coil at the end of the heavy length so that I could swing it inward to little J. back and out of sight beneath me in the recess. The second cast was true: I felt him handle it, and then I let it go for those in the more direct line above to hold. Presently I saw it writhing away from me across the few visible feet of stooping crag, as J. below moved away to start the icy corner. He had, I think, two sacks beside his own and at least three extra axes slung on to him; but he grappled up the corner masterfully and forced his way out on to the roof. Hopeless of lifting him as they had lifted us, the men above had learned, from pure fatigue, to leave him more free upon the rope. But he was naturally a very long time; and there was all too much leisure in which to realize how irrevocably our descent was now cut off, and how improbably our ascent could be continued.

The first flare of blinding relief died down. The obscure future settled round again like a fog. The precipice receding into murky uncertainty above looked more than ever dark with discouragement for a vitality ebbing on the tide of reaction. The shadowy, humping figures above were silent; there was none of that heartening talk which greets us over a difficult edge, giving us assurance that the worst is past. With no longer even the rope about me as a reminder of companionship, the sense that others were near me and in like case passed out of mind. My thoughts wandered drowsily, and all life in the limbs seemed suspended, as we feel it to be sometimes in the moments just preceding sleep.

The snow began to fall in large, soft flakes; not the tingling darts that assail us with the crisp hostility of intruders upon our alien earth, but flakes like wings, instinct with life, surrounding and welcoming a visitor to their own region of air with vague but insistent friendliness. A few of them settled inquisitively, to gleam and fade for a second like fallen starlight, on the short arc of brown crag racing into shadow between my feet. The rest drifted lightly and recklessly down past my heels, to disappear over the rim of void: suggesting how easy and restful might be my own descent could tired muscles but be persuaded to relax their tenacious hold upon the few remaining feet of inhospitable rock. Far below and to the right, a brow of bending and frosted precipice frowned into

sight; and against and round its more familiar obstruction, lit by a pale glare diffused through the low clouds, the white flakes twirled and circled intimately, already forgetful of their more timid flight past the stranger above. When they sank from it, it was into an immensity of grey haze, featureless but for the black ribbons of moraine which floated high and distinct above their unseen glaciers, as reeds seem to sway and float high over the reflecting depths of a transparent stream. Into these immeasurable grey depths everything seemed to be descending, unresistingly and as of choice,—the long lines of ice-fast crag, the shifting eddies of snow, the rays of darkness under the storm-clouds, even the eye and the tired mind. Some rebellious instinct of hand and foot alone appeared to defy a universal law.

The ceaseless movement of the snow spread to the rock. We must all have felt, when we look up at overhanging cliffs, how they lean out, rushing, above us, and yet never visibly stir; as if their furious motion were not in space but through some other dimension. The same sensation came as I clung on to the rough short bend of rock islanded in the sky. The dome swayed out and out perpetually under me, and yet did not move for sight or touch. Not common 'giddiness'; my eyes held the crags as firmly in place as my feet and hands were holding me. Then the movement became general; an impetuous hurtling across the sky, which yet left heights and depths in their fixed relation to one another. And imagination conjectured that this must be the spin of the earth, perceptible upon one of its pre-eminent spires.

Back, with a slight shock, came the realization of the loneliness, of the long waiting, and of the still probable end to it. What do we think of at these times? While action is still possible for us, we think, deliberately, of that alone. But when action is suspended? We do not think for long about our fears. We cannot continue to feel frightened of a certainty, or even of a probability. Any keen fear must be constantly fed by new danger, and the drug be kept effervescing by fresh uncertainty, for its fumes to maintain their strength. Fear for ourselves, unstirred and undiluted, soon tastes flat: we cease to feel afraid of being frightened. And when that point is past, our mere instinct to avoid a very common experience cannot hold more than a part of our interest.

Nor do we think much about death itself, or what may come after. That which follows after cannot happen to us as

we are ; and therefore, to a condition of mind too pre-occupied about the tremendous present to have leisure for speculation about other or abstract states, it seems immaterial. As for the matter of our dying—we have already accepted the event. The ending of our personality, in all its aspects and in all its consequences for others, has been envisaged ; and, with that, it also has become no longer of the first importance.

Thought, in fact, seemed to me to be released just as much from human cares and compassions as from any supernatural concern. It pursued a deeper, or at least a different path, into a region of impressions, stern, unemotional, and strangely impersonal. The flaring up of the essential personality under a sudden threat of extinction—such as I noted when falling into the crevasse—was not perceptible : the realization of the threat, under the gradual closing of the grey wings, had been too cumulative and too slow. The sense of myself as an individual seemed indeed to have been gradually lost, or all but lost. In its place I had the feeling of belonging to, or of being myself, some infinite experience, at the moment passing through a cloud. I am illustrating and not attempting to explain the feeling, when I say that it was as if my consciousness, when the door was almost closed upon an existence for me personally, had become again all but absorbed into the continuous and transmitted principle of life within me. It was a sphere of sensation—or of absence of sensation—which I could only describe in meaningless words, illimitable, unhuman, all-comprehending, all-disregarding and their like. During my experience of it, it was more dark with the knowledge of its ages of recurring interruption, by individual death, than alight with the assurance of its perpetual reappearance in new lives. For this prevalence of shadow at the time my own situation may have been responsible ; because my life-tenancy of the transmitted principle was still holding good, and the extinction which threatened this personal tenure could not, therefore, but continue to colour any thought of mine however far withdrawn.

Certainly, my personal interest in living, although reduced, was not at an end. The purpose, for instance, to battle out the remainder of the climb if only for the time remaining to me needed no reinforcement. But it had become subordinate : whether I remained alive or not had become a minor, if still a surviving, interest.

When we began to climb again, I noticed that the value

of being alive as myself grew greater, with the greater opportunity which action gives us for individual assertion. At the same time the feeling of belonging to an impersonal, timeless existence diminished; but it remained uppermost in thought. When, later, and without warning or gradual preparation, the probability if not the certainty of our safety suddenly broke in upon me, the first result was a comic reversal in the precedence of these interests in thought. I laughed to myself to feel how the importance of my being alive immediately and truculently reasserted itself; how the sense of personality expanded, until it exceeded even its own normally large dimensions. And, a little later still, I had to laugh again, to think that I of all people should ever have been brought to the point of laughing at myself for being in love with life!

That last laugh was perhaps the best. It was one of the predicates of a friendlier understanding of life in all its presentments, of a lesson in detachment—or humour—learned, which came back with me from that shadowy exploration. Men who survived the weeks of dedication to ‘services of special danger’ in the war, could give better account. But no one who had lived through even the few hours we spent upon the southern precipice, under the grey wings, could have emerged from them—and felt in himself no change.

The appearance of little J. as he clambered, a clattering brown goblin of sack-humps and axe-points, over a boss on the shadowy dome beside me brought me back to the world of human company, and struggle. The day was darkening steadily—or is my memory of darkness only the shadow of our circumstance? for it was not yet four o’clock: but the snow stopped, having done its worst where it could most impede us. We roped up patiently, and began again our age-long crawl and halt up icy slabs as little kindly as before; and every fifty feet above us loomed still the threat of a total interruption. If it came now—it must just come! We had none of us, I think, any apprehension left: or, for that matter, any comprehension of much more than hanging on and forcing up. In my own case—and a truthful record of sensation limits me to thinking only of myself—the capacity to feel or to remark was exhausted. Franz must have been more nervously alert, for he ground out a devious upward line through the upheaving of giant slabs without a halt or a false attempt. I can recall nothing but obscurity, steepness, and an endless driving of the muscles to their task. Still no message of hope reached us from above;

and yet we must have left another four hundred feet of rib and crack, snow-ice and equivocal holds below us. Even fancy dared not whisper to itself of the summit: the next five feet, and still the next five feet were the end of all effort and expectation.

And then, something was happening! There came a mutter of talk from the dusk above. Surely two shadows were actually moving at one time? I was at the foot of a long icy shelf, slanting up to the right. It was overhung by cliff on the left, as usual. It was falling away into space on my right, as usual; and it had the usual absence of any holds to keep me on it. I began the eternal knee-friction crawl. The rope tightened on my waist. "Shall I pull?"—called Josef's voice, sounding strange after the hours of silence, and subdued to an undertone as if he feared that the peak might still hear and wake up to contrive some new devilment. "Why not?—if you really can!"—I echoed, full of surprise and hope; and I skimmed up the trough, to find Josef yoked to a royal rock hitch, the third and the best of the day! And, surely, we were standing on the crest of a great ridge, materialized as if by magic out of the continuous darkness of cliff and sky? And the big, sullen shadow just above must be the summit! It was indeed the mounting edge of the south-east ridge upon which we had arrived; and sixty feet above us it curled over against the top of the final pyramid. Josef unroped from me, while I brought up little J.; and as we started to finish the ascent together in our old-time partnership, I saw the silhouettes of the other three pass in succession over the pointed skyline of the peak.

We found them, relaxed in spent attitudes on the summit-slabs, swallowing sardines and snow, our first food since half-past seven in the morning. It was now close upon six o'clock. Franz came across to meet me, and we shook hands. "You will never do anything harder than that, Franz!" "No," he said reflectively, "man could not do much more."

The end of the story follows the usual route down hill as easily as we did; and it must hurry down those ten thousand feet as quickly. Little J. and I raced ahead down the evening snow-slopes with the advantage of being only two. Darkness caught us as we reached the moraine at the end of the Kien glacier. We scattered to search for the then new Kien hut, to shelter in for the night. J. found the track to it, but Franz had dashed on ahead and down, and the rest of us were already far enough below to make it unwise to recall us uphill again.

We straggled and tumbled down through the precipitous woods, vainly seeking for the subtle evasions of the old Randa path. The candle-lamps proved, as always, consolatory but ineffective. I believe I found the track first, by falling headlong down a bank of pine-roots and alighting on the abrupt surprise of a horizontal surface. On lower alps at night, this is the surest indication that we have hit the path.

Into Randa we trudged at half an hour before midnight, for a genuine meal. And then, leaving the guides to sleep, and to forget all but the greatness of their exploit, Ryan and I started again and drove and walked the long historic miles up to Zermatt. At a quarter past three we began our last dinner and our first breakfast, rounding off a circle of sensation which had lasted twenty-six hours in time, and left some impressions as deeply graven as those of the five later years of war.

Since then Josef, great guide and good comrade, has left us. The incomparable Franz and my own unique little J., I rejoice to think, still head the glorious band of Skt. Niklaus guides. But of the Täschhorn by the south face there has not yet been a re-ascent—or a revised version.

CHAPTER XIV

MONT BLANC BY THE WAY

Live life at the full ;
Blend dream with the deed ;
Drink deep of the draught.

FOR many years I avoided ascending Mont Blanc. The name had a tragic significance for us ; and the long snowy monotony of the usual routes to the summit offered no sustained interest such as might serve to keep the shadows of memory from clouding the pleasure of an ascent.

Once I almost reached the top, by accident. The beautiful mountaineering route on its eastern flank, from the col du Midi over Mont Blanc du Tacul and Mont Maudit, proved irresistible to my friends as a training walk. That it was leading us high up on to the shoulder of Mont Blanc was lost sight of during the actual thrills of the day. A high, cold wind kept waterfalls of snow-crystals hissing down the steep icy slopes and washing round our ankles in shallow rapids, noisy and sensational, but comparatively harmless. It seemed as if every few minutes somebody, a few thousand feet above us on the ridge, was rudely spilling huge buckets of frozen milk down at us as we clung to our ice-steps. The provocation naturally led us on ; and it was only when we arrived at the hut on the Rochers Rouges, well up near the summit, that the grey mounding of large laborious snow-slopes, seen through a chilly fog of fine sleet, recalled to me where we were going. A severe 'first-day' headache made a sufficient excuse for my resisting the very slight temptation of pushing on to the top with the others.

It was considerably later that a closer acquaintance with the noble ridges and glaciers of the southern, or Italian, aspect of Mont Blanc brought about a change of heart and of intention.

There is no grander view in Europe. The northern world ends upon the sudden uprush of the Alps ; and over this lifted rim Mont Blanc crouches, like a great craggy lion, staring out across the fading blue levels and distances of Italy and the southern



Peuteret Ridge and Aiguilles

Brouillard Ridge.

MONT BLANC
from the South

world. A white mane of crinkling glacier cascades over his rock precipices, checking and dividing among the lesser ribs and buttresses; and two leonine shoulders, the Peuteret ridge and the Brouillard ridge, upon which every pinnacle is itself a mountain, bulk far out beyond plinth and pedestal, and bear, with two vast forepaws, upon the falling plains.

To challenge the monarch in face and master him by one of these frontal ridges seemed worthy of his dignity—and ours. The Peuteret shoulder had been ascended, and most of the summits on its extended paw. On the Brouillard forepaw, also, most of the peaks had been climbed; but higher up, between the elbow and the point of the shoulder, a stubborn section of rugged precipice had resisted all attack. Halfway up the sky, above the swirl of torrent-like glaciers and above the highest pinnacle on the projecting rock arm, a beautiful little white notch or pass, the col Emile Rey, marks the junction of Brouillard paw and Brouillard shoulder; and it marked, then, the highest point reached. Above it, a great shrug of rounded precipice, draped with glacier and ice-pennon, mounts for some two thousand feet, until it contracts into an epaulet, the Pic Luigi Amedeo. And from here the sweep of the rock shoulder, snow-veined crest and spire and castle, stretches in splendid symmetry upward across the sky to the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur.

The indefatigable Italian brothers Gugliermi, after prolonged sieges and many involuntary bivouacs at glacial heights, reached the Pic Luigi Amedeo up its rock wall from the Mont Blanc glacier, well round behind the shrug of shoulder on the west; spending three more nights out, if I remember rightly, during the ascent. Other famous parties reached the col Emile Rey from either side, but could make no progress towards mastering the direct route beyond. In fact, the cloak of ice which normally covers these higher crags, the stones from the little hanging glacier above which bombard the only line of attack during all the hours of sunlight, the immense length of the expedition, and the obvious quantity of difficult climbing which would have to be got through at great speed and at a great height—all combined to place this ridge in a class by itself among alpine problems. For its solution, even for its attempt, exactly the right day, exactly the right conditions, and exactly the right party were all necessary preliminary conditions. And on the Brouillard corner they had never yet been found in favourable conjunction.

The most scientific mountaineer of his time, Oscar Eckenstein, after his own active explorations ceased, kept this section year

after year under telescopic observation from Courmayeur. Against all the pessimists he maintained that it could be ascended by means of a funnel or flaw running up the Amedeo slabs, if and when the rocks should ever be reasonably free of ice; for in a normal year the funnel was a sheer fall of green and white icicle. His interest in the problem was responsible for the little swarm of notable Italian, Austrian, and, eventually, British mountaineers, who buzzed into Courmayeur season after season, circulated and telescoped and took counsel mysteriously for a while, and then buzzed out again in dejection.

I have always since felt somewhat apologetic to these gentlemen: my own single intrusion on the story was so casual and so late in the day. H. O. Jones insisted one year that we should put the ridge on our joint programme. I was, at the time, in the act of calling upon him in Cambridge, to congratulate him upon some fresh distinction: that is to say, I was half-way up the outside corner of Clare College on my way to the window of his rooms—and in no position to argue. But I had, frankly, been a trifle bored by the gossip about this mysterious route. Some of its freshness as an adventure seemed to be already gone after the thousand and one nights of pottering and bivouacking and photographing which had made up most of its history. I should have preferred trying one, or even two, entirely novel lines up the south-east face of Mont Blanc, of the feasibility of which I was convinced. But when I followed out the ridge on the map, and still more when I saw it in actuality, curving and thundering down out of the sky like one giant balustrade of a seraphic grand-staircase—the most continuous high-level route up the most salient and lofty ridge in western Europe—I agreed that no worthier way of ascending Mont Blanc could be imagined; and that it was finer mountaineering to fashion this last step in a great natural stairway of ascent than to contrive arbitrary and ‘emergency-fire-escape’ sorts of lines up the face.

I made one stipulation—that we were not to be expected to conform to the Courmayeur tradition of ‘bivouacs’ (involuntary nights out on the mountain). I have always had a prejudice against being overtaken by darkness upon a climb: it is comfortless, it may be dangerous, and it impinges upon one’s mountaineering self-respect.

That was the season of all seasons. Never before in the half-century of mountaineering record had weather and mountains maintained such perfect condition. It was a happy fate that brought H. O. Jones, Josef Knubel, and myself together again

as a climbing company that year. We were ready to take full advantage of the summer's fortune ; and, at its close, we could look back upon our holiday weeks and feel honestly that we had not wasted one day of their perfection.

We began, as I have related in the story of the Jorasses, in Dauphiné, with some training expeditions of an enterprising kind. Then we sent the guides and luggage round by long train, and ourselves drove over the passes to Courmayeur. The drive over the col du Galibier I still remember as the most dangerous and nervous experience of that year, or of any year. The road had only recently been 'adapted,' after centuries of mule traffic, for motor traffic. A top-heavy char-à-banc of the plains had not yet been 'adapted' for the road. The driver faced these facts, and flung the issue into the hands of pace and chance. The public also must have recognized the facts, for H. O. and I were the sole passengers. Down the contorted zigzags of a steep alpine pass we swung and swooped. At each turn we spun, skidded, and tottered. Twice certainly the outside edge of the new-piled road crumbled, and a wheel slithered over. Once both side-wheels were over together, and only pace and improbability brought us up on to the road again. H. O. and I occupied each one whole, empty cross-seat. With pale, set faces we crouched taut and ready, our knees bent, our hands gripping the back of the seat in front. As the car swirled round each zig, in one lightning slide we shot across the width of the car and gained the inside edge again, hanging well out, and ready always to leap if the topple *this* time went too far ! There were millions of hair-pin bends, and we rocketed breathlessly across the car and hung out on the alternate sides for centuries. So that it is safe to 'star' the wheeled descent of this pass as more definitely fatiguing than the ordinary footway up the Matterhorn.

At Courmayeur we ran into an electrically charged atmosphere. Our arrival was enveloped, almost literally, by the agitation of a notable Austrian mountaineer, Doctor Karl Blodig—for my purposes here to be known as "the Doctor." With him H. O. had made some of the earlier explorations upon the Brouillard ridge. Incidentally, he was one of a few great mountaineers who had made it their interesting ambition to ascend all the peaks in the Alps of more than 4,000 metres in height. Now, some years before, the Doctor had finished them off, all sixty-five of them. Then, most inconsiderately, two new points were climbed and entered on the maps—one on the Jorasses ridge, the Punta Margherita ; the other the Pic Luigi Amedeo, on the Brouillard

shoulder. Thus the Doctor found himself well over fifty years of age, and faced with these two formidable additions. Moreover, the following seasons had proved unfavourable ; and, more serious still, during the intervening years his competitors were overhauling him. Another Austrian, Dr. Pühn, had even equalled his record. Well, to put the matter shortly, H. O. had promised to help the Doctor to his final victory if this season should prove kind.

We arrived to find it almost too late. The ice was off the flaw or furrow, and the gloves were off among the doctors assembled in Courmayeur. Dr. Pühn had used the fine weather well, and had actually gone ahead in the race. He had climbed the Punta Margherita, and was on the point of starting for the Amedeo. It could hardly increase the commotion in the region that another famous competitor, Ing. Pfann, was said to be already bivouacking out for the same ascent.

However, the full moon was not to be for a couple of days ; and without a good moon we had decided that the col Emile Rey could not be reached by sunrise. And unless we could reach the col by sunrise, we could not hope to surmount the rocks above it early enough to escape the stone-fall that should start with the sun :—

I will not play at the stone-chucking,
Nor will I play at the ball ;
But I'll go up to yon bonnie green hill,
And there we'll wrestle a fall.

The stone-chucking on the Amedeo was little likely to be playful. We must be through with our wrestle with our bonnie green hill before it started in earnest.

We filled up the gap profitably by sending the Doctor up the Margherita with some of our company, while we made some useful explorations upon the Grandes Jorasses, another scheme in prospect. The weather held bravely. The Gemini flashed upon our early starts—an omen of good fortune as we found that year. Storms gathered, only to break and clear.

We met our Doctor in the valley ; and the next day at about eleven o'clock, a culpably late hour, we set out for the eight hours' initial climb up to the Quintino Sella hut, a little alpine refuge far up on our mountain, where we were to sleep for the few evening hours before our attempt. My companions were full fraught with all the topographical knowledge necessary for our design. My own energies could be confined to giving an impetus

to one idea—that to succeed we must strike hard, strike quickly, and go on striking until our stroke was home—("Nothing," replied the artist, "will ever be attempted if all possible objections must be first overcome.")—No more virtue must be lost in 'exploration' or in superpreparation. To let the mountain, when we came under the influence of its terrific walls, have time to impose itself upon our imagination, would be a sure way to submersion among the eddies of failure which for so many years had circled up to, and argued round, and subsided back from the white boundary mark of the col Emile Rey.

The ascent up to the Quintino hut is in itself a fine mountain excursion. Up to the end of the Val d'Aosta, then left-handed through the woods of the beautiful Val Veni, passing below the end of the Peuteret ridge, with the Aiguille Noire like a black-cowled giant far over our heads. So on, below the impracticable and turbulent icefalls of the Fresnay and the Brouillard glaciers, towards the grim paw of the Brouillard ridge itself. Before we came under its shadow we could look up to where, floating above the Brouillard glacier and against deep blue sky, the small white bow of the col Emile Rey glittered remotely. The paw once passed, we turned right-handed up the interminable Miage glacier, penetrating into the inner depths of the Mont Blanc mass. We were journeying now up and along behind the Brouillard ridge; and again we could look up and watch, but from exactly the opposite side, the challenging silver arc of the famous col.

The Miage glacier is presumably longer than its moraines, but its moraines no mortal man may measure. However, even moraines have degrees in unpleasantness. The Miage glacier is level, for a glacier, and the stones of its moraines are flat, like thin plates. Often in my passages up and down the Miage, as the noisy, comfortable ware has crackled and snapped under my boot-nails, there has come to me something of the satisfactory destructive thrill which used to give to the game of 'Breaking up the Happy Home' at Earl's Court and elsewhere such distinctive pleasure.

Our day's climbing began where we turned up off the Miage on to the base of Mont Blanc, scaling the chaos of hanging broken ice that is the Mont Blanc glacier. Some of the ice rapids were highly elaborated and ingenious; and Josef and I, who were wearing eight-point ice-claws, had all we could do to keep pace safely with the Courmayeur ice-experts on their great ten-point irons. The Quintino hut, poised above the brink of the glacier

fall, clings sensationally on to a bracket of big rocks some ten thousand feet up the western flank of Mont Blanc. It is impressively high and solitary. It is also seldom used ; and I recollect some labour of scraping out old wet straw from the sleeping-bunk, although, fortunately, a few predecessors that year had reduced the internal accumulations of ice.

A drizzle of cold rain that froze as it fell attended our meal. Nevertheless, upon the tangle of pointed and tumbled needles to which the hut is moored, the Doctor, whose gymnastic suppleness and endurance were miraculous for his years, treated us to a twilight exhibition of straight-arm balances, hock-swings-off, rising suns, and the like echoes of our youth.

The sun set opposite to us, over France. The level red rays reached at us round the interrupting western Aiguilles beyond the Miage glacier, and heaped the thin moist air about us into waves and flushes of agitated colour, that contrasted strangely with the still, white silence and the underlying dead white chill. The colour did not fade ; it went out, suddenly, behind the dark and ice-blue screen of the Aiguilles de Trélatête.

A blanket of dank grey mist muffled us up with night—the first bad omen of our season. If this lasted over midnight, we could not attempt our climb the next day. For, apart from other considerations of precaution, mist would obscure our moon ; and without moonlight we should venture upon the dangerous crevasses of the Mont Blanc glacier, or assault the fearsome ice couloir up to the col, blindfold and hobbled, perilously. Now this was obvious. But there was yet another mist that threatened us more seriously. If we were all to be too reasonable, if the flame of enterprise were not fanned almost frantically and foolishly, the fatal miasma that had crept upon all parties dallying in this hut or round this climb in the past might creep upon us, and we should become yet another back eddy. So—‘ the channering worm did chide ’ : that is to say, I insisted, irritatingly, upon our preparing to start ; and I insisted still upon our remaining ready to start, in defiance of the fog-bank that slept round us unchanging at midnight. H. O., I think, saw the undercurrents, and was amused ; to the others I may have served as at least some counter-irritant to the demoralizing depression of a blank day. In the end the effect was good. We spent all the cloudy morrow in step-cutting and preparing a good line across the mazy crevasses of the upper glacier to the foot of our couloir : a tract reputed, that year certainly, to be impassable.

Between two different levels of the glacier we had to force a way up a stiff wall of rock of the broken indeterminate type. Here I was first introduced to a continental practice of marking the route at points of divergence with squares of red paper, so as to assist the return. It seemed to me a blotchy and enervating habit; and on our return I, for one, found it easier to rediscover the route than the 'spottit and speckit' red paper.

That evening the fog lifted from brilliant stars and a deep, hopeful blue of night. We made our final dispositions confidently. The excellent Doctor was a teetotaller; but his studies had taught him that all the nutritory elements are to be had from alcohol and butter, neat. With these, therefore, in their crude mass, his sack was formidably charged. Æsthetically, the idea of devouring lumps of yellow butter, with or without alcohol, is unpleasing. To this prejudice I must attribute my chilly refusal to have our sacks 'weighed' all round, in order to test if our burdens were equal. A dead-weight block of cold-smelling butter was a handicap from which I shrank. But I fear that the Doctor thought me unneighbourly.

We started at one o'clock, in ice-clear silence. The moon came out to meet us on the glacier, and roused a flurry and shiver of frosted light among the white banners and escutcheons of ice and snow which hung from the shadowy walls of great mountains round us. We counted upon her light lasting until we reached the col. But we had to travel fast, for she would be down again among the forest of summits some time before the sun could be up to take her place.

The surface snows of the glacier at this great height and at this hour of a cold night were frozen iron hard. We could stride ahead on our ice-claws without fear of snow-bridges breaking through, or of the steps prepared the day before failing us. There was no need for the rope over most of the way, and we followed up in silent and companionable independence of each other with the glorious swing and spring that a frozen snow surface can give to the feet.

In an hour we had traversed the line which it had taken us most of the day before to prepare; and soon after two o'clock we stood in a little bay of steep glacier at the foot of our great couloir, with the shadow of its lower rock walls thrown about us on the moonlit snow. From the snowy pass above us to the glacier round us the couloir descended in one splendid white fall of some fifteen hundred feet. The average angle of its slope we found to be forty-seven degrees, and in parts it steepened

to fifty-five degrees and more. Which is as much as to say that from in front it *looked* perpendicular, and that it actually *was* very steep for such a long and continuous incline.

To our delight—for the ill weather might have left us a hard ice surface necessitating many hours' laborious work—we found a hard snow surface in perfect condition; too hard to kick steps up with a boot, but just right for good holding with the ice-claw. It was a joyous omen for our day. There was no need for the rope. We had nothing to do but just to turn round and walk up it.

Josef and I went ahead. There was a little friendly rivalry between the Courmayeur school of ten-pronged ice experts and our outlander, skirmishing, eight-pronged detachment. But there is no doubt that, holding by only their two long toe-points to the steep hard slope, they followed straightforwardly and more easily where we, with our shorter and badly distributed points, had to employ all kinds of fatiguing ankle-flexes and side-foot holds.

The pleasure of that day's company was that we were all justifiably sure of each other. Each could feel free to concentrate upon his own safe progress, certain that if that were secured the party could come to no harm. At the time, indeed, I could not help smiling to myself at what the story might sound like in the telling. Here we were, four men approaching or past middle age, clinging by our prongs up a precipitous shoot of snow and ice more than a thousand feet high, in only the uncertain glimmer of moonlight; and yet so rashly, as it seemed, were we convinced of our immunity that there was never a thought of roping, and that we even indulged in an occasional spurt of very quiet and gentlemanlike racing to test the merit of our respective claws.

Sometimes we could relieve our ankle-play by a handhold or a step on the rocks at the side of the couloir. Once or twice the snow steepened and hardened into short bulges of ice, hard and grey; and then, while Josef above me chipped with his axe a ladder of little nicks for our points, I had a moment in which to look round.

The impression in that lighting of the moon was always very unreal. A blur of sheer whiteness bordered by dark rock shade rushed upward so steeply in front that it was difficult and confusing even to attempt to follow it up far with the eyes. Under my feet shot down a short dazzle of moon-gleam on whiteness; up which were crawling the queer, foreshortened shadow-smudges which were my companions. And behind them and round them

and below them there was only a grey feeling of depth and of unfriendly nothingness. It needed the faint ache in the one bent ankle clinging to the ice, or the jar of the axe-head hooked into the ice-bulge above, to assure me that I was not a cold wraith drifting against space or a wisp of consciousness depending unsubstantially from the tail of a moonbeam.

So nicely had we, or rather chance, calculated the measure of moonlight that, when we were some two-thirds of the way up, we found ourselves moving not far ahead of a climbing darkness. The moon was dipping behind the icy spearheads of the Trélatête across the void to the west of us ; and their mounting shadow was hunting the lower edge of the moonlight up our couloir behind us, always faster and closer on to our heels. We raced on, in order to keep our footing upon our magic moon-carpet ; and we were not far below the pass when the pursuing breadth of darkness suddenly caught us, passed us, and swept on up to the col and away over the sky. The last steep neck of snow and rock we had to scale as best we could, and cautiously, in the lesser dusk of starlight.

With the passing of the moonlight the atmosphere of unreality died away. A very real coldness and lifelessness of sky and rock and ice, an impression of enormous heights and depths and lowering spaces, made one feel very mortal, very friendless, and fantastically venturesome. As we clustered on the icy crest of the pass, from which the two narrow shafts of grey-white precipice plunged down on either side into a hazy and shivering remoteness, little breaths of chill wind, the stir before the dawn, sighed far below in the darkness, and then hissed up at us over the thousand feet of frozen surface. As out of a deep well you hear first the single remote whisper of water disturbed, and then the sustained rustle of multiplying echoes following more rumours up the walls.

It was not much after four, and we had been barely two hours cat-climbing up the couloir. It followed that we were well ahead of our time allowance ; and that we had to wait awhile for sunrise before starting our attack upon the next forbidding line of defence, the rounded, bulking red shoulder of Mont Blanc which overhung the northern end of our col. But at its southern end this sky-hammock of snow curved up archly and temptingly to a rank of steep, sharp rock needles leading towards the top of Mont Brouillard. In the course of their former explorations H. O. and the Doctor had both climbed Mont Brouillard over this arête. To them it could not a second time offer a consola-

tion prize. So they perched on a ledge under the white loop of the pass, and waited meditatively for the sun. But Josef and I were here for the first time. We wanted to keep warm, to feel rock under our feet after all that snow and ice work, and above all to get a view of the unclimbed red crags to the north from some point of higher advantage.

So we set off hot-foot up the split needles of the Mont Brouillard. We kept our claws on, to give us extra security in the half-light and over the glazed rocks. Once again, and unexpectedly, we two were off together alone. The mood was on us. Our lungs were filled with laughter and with the bubble of life and coming battle. I chanced to be in front, and for once, I think, I made Josef almost pant. We reached the highest rock steeple in nine minutes.

Then we sat down solemnly in convenient crooks of the overhanging needles, and we were very serious and grown-up together, microscopically surveying the ponderous uproll of dark cliffs which loomed at us across the Pisgah-gap of the pass. The famous flaw was just in sight, half hidden behind a projection on the eastward curve of the crags facing us. It looked severe, of bad, wet rock, almost sheer; but—it was clear of ice. Its difficulty would not, we thought, defeat us, but its danger might. Directly opposite to us, on the crags above the white connecting thread of the col, we also traced out two other perpendicular but possible lines of ascent, good enough at least to attempt. Round the whole headland of cliff confronting us the difficulty lay up the first two or three hundred feet above the level of the pass. Above that the rocks gave back reassuringly. In fact, above the flaw, further to the east, we knew that they inclined enough to support a small hanging glacier or snow slope; and it was the fall of stones over this incline, using our flaw as an escape pipe, which formed its principal danger.

Dawn had helped our examination. As we dropped back on to the pass I looked down from the last rock spike some forty feet above their heads, and saw my two friends huddled on the frail white sling across space like two dejected brown birds; and I remembered what a dramatic moment this ought to be. In a few short seconds, from our aerial but now almost domesticated perch, we were going to step off and up into the unknown, to be the first to touch a portion of the earth's surface kept secret and inviolable since rock and man took form out of chaos. I must admit, however, that my actual thought was—how very crumpled and dissipated human beings do look out of bed before



Col Emile Rey

Pic Luigi Amedeo

BROUILLARD RIDGE

sunrise ; and as to the historic impasse, whatever thrills it might have given me as a sentimentalist, it left me no doubts as a mountaineer. With the exception of the Doctor, who could not bring himself to believe in a chance of success after so many years of failure and of hope deferred, we breakfasted very confidently in the face of the sunrise. A short spell of sun-warmth we could allow ourselves—it would air the rocks for us and take off the glaze ; but a little more would start the stone-fall. So we roped up, and just after five o'clock we traversed out under the hot early sun-glare, eastward off our snow-bracket, and out along the cliffs below the flaw and above the ice-slopes which fell to the Brouillard glacier.

We might neglect no precaution while the old tradition, that there was something palpitatingly inaccessible above this pass, still held ; so we combined our forces, and roped up all four together, with Josef in the lead. The flaw was a spatulate, irregular, flat-backed scoop up the crags, enclosed between worn, slabby and loose walls. It was steep enough ; and there was one sheer corner that called for delicate balancing ; and yet another slab which leaned out at us for thirty feet and yielded only a few minute holds. But the only real difficulty lay in the rottenness of the rocks. For years uncounted these had been cased in ice. Now ice free, their exposed surfaces were raw and disintegrating. Large ledges and their supports peeled off as readily as do the mantel-shelf and its spurious pilasters in a Model-dwelling parlour if you stand upon them inadvertently.

We climbed very fast. There was some hollow guttural of humorous protest from the Doctor at the tail of the rope and out of sight. But since the funnel, when we were in it, revealed itself still more obviously as a waste-pipe for the whole area of cliff and glacier above, and its ledges were loaded with recent rubble-fall, H. O., who was next above him, kept our mercurial tail up to the headlong pace. After a time the gully widened, as the top of a funnel should, and opened out upon an amphitheatre of more broken crag. We worked up the slant of lesser opposition, towards our left ; and in less than an hour from the foot of the flaw we found ourselves out upon easier rock, and approaching the actual skyline of the ridge. We joined it at a point where the rounded shrug of cliff surmounting the col had again begun to contract and to take the form of a continuous crest.

To avoid the overhangs and the strident forms upon the crest itself, we struck upward and again to the right. In another half-hour we reached the lower end of the steep hanging glacier

or snow field, which is the feature of this face. In the heat of that year this field contracted notably. Later in the season, for the first time on record, it practically disappeared. When we crossed it, the rocks of its bed were already showing through the diminishing shallows of snow.

At first we stormed up the good snow as we pleased, each on his own line. But the sight of stone-furrows on the surface warned us that we might at any moment hear the sizzle of an opening barrage; and we concentrated upon a slim rock rib that bisected the eastern lobe of our snow flat and looked like the back of an all but submerged hippopotamus. Actually no stones fell, so early and rapid was our passage. As we ascended, the crest of the ridge upon our left swung in across and ahead of us, until we found ourselves coursing up the dilapidated masonry of its flanking wall. We had only to clamber up this, and, in an hour from the foot of the snow field, we were out upon the edge of the Brouillard ridge again. But this time above all the "impossibilities," and with nothing between us and the summit of the Pic Luigi Amedeo.

This crest, the final rock outwork of the highest mountain in the Alps, has borne the brunt of the battle between earth and the elements. Hurricane and lightning and frost have reduced its fabric to the ruined semblance of a corner of what once was Ypres. Over the fragmentary pinnacles and gables we scrambled with clinking axes; and just before eight o'clock the rest of us halted, in order to let the Doctor pass by and step first on to the actual summit blocks. The grey-bearded Doctor took off his hat, and gave three cheers for the Climbers' Club. For him it must have been a very inspiring moment. He was upon the last and latest of the 'four-thousanders.' He was the first man to complete the list. Years before he had been near his goal. There had followed the discovery of new peaks, and the succession of disappointing seasons. Age had caught him up. For a week this year one rival had even passed him. And now he had won, almost unexpectedly, and finally. More than that, this last four-thousander was, as we knew, to be his last great climb, and he had now fulfilled the ambition of his life and terminated his mountain career by taking part in an ascent which achieved the first direct passage up the greatest ridge of the monarch of the Alps, and which forged the final link in one of the last great unsolved alpine problems.

It was too early in the day, and too much still lay before us, for the reaction that usually follows the ending of the up-climb

to make itself felt. Great mountaineering calls for absolute concentration. Every other interest is banished for the time, and often for so long a time that when our effort ceases other and extraneous ideas can only find their way back very slowly from their far-distant exile. During this interval we revel in a roomy and gorgeous emptiness, called rest. But to attain to its pacific joys the day's work must be ascertainably behind us. And we had still far to go.

We sat on our hot jumble of cyclopean fragments, and looked out, alert and unrelaxed, over the realms at our feet—France to the west and Italy to the south. The air was utterly still, and its immense visible spaces were so full of limpid sunlight that the level violet distances quivered as though seen through still water, and the nearer silvery and red-rusted peaks reached up towards us in uncertain outline, faintly tremulous, like reflections.

Half an hour went by, and then the detail of the great ridge we had yet to climb grew upon our attention, until it blocked out all the rest of the view. Above us to the north the high upper snows of Mont Blanc were heaped up in white and silver undulations and blue-rifted, lazy domes. Over Italy the procession of snow palaces ended abruptly in the lion head of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, with its mane of white cornices tumbling over the colossal red brow. Between the lion head and ourselves lay the great serrated ridge, a long descending line of gigantic spire and tower and edge—here crowned by a frosted arc of snow like a silver fin, there armoured with red-black scales and spines. It looked enormous, exciting, and delightful. Close behind our peak the approaching ridge descended into a deep, sharp notch several hundred feet below our level; and it only climbed out of this again, and up towards us, in crazy-looking fashion, winding shakily, and balancing slabs and turrets upon its razor edge as a juggler does soup-tureens.

There was no time to lose if we were to break the tradition of the bivouac. This ridge was going to be an undertaking 'hault et fier'—high-class mountaineering at a high rate of speed. For the tricky descent into the gap we roped together again; and I came last, as I wished to see what rate our machinery would stand, and to judge whether we should be justified in breaking up into smaller, quicker parties when we reached the sounder-looking ridge beyond. We wound down the rickety edge into the notch, and up the first precipitous step of rock on the farther ridge. Here I think we made our only mistake. We took a difficult crack up the firmer rock on the north side of the nose in

preference to a more direct line up its decaying southern aspect. From above we saw that this last would have been easier and quicker—in fact, all the loose, littered rock-surface of the crest held together more tightly than we had any right to expect.

It was now a quarter-past nine, and at this point I suggested that we should break up into pairs. To climb four on a rope along a castellated ridge of this kind would only lose us time and add nothing to our safety. The Doctor had been, in the valley, a little difficult about my bringing a 'professional guide' upon this historic climb. I was pleased, therefore, to find that he now welcomed warmly the proposal that he should combine with Josef, while H. O. and I could lay ourselves out to enjoy life ahead. We did! There is no comradeship like that of two friends mountaineering together. They can achieve a sympathy of movement greater than that of any machine; and the closer their accord in action, the readier is their appreciation of each other's dissimilar temperament or divergent point of view. H. O. was the ideal comrade. His climbing was a model of agile, accurate, and elegant movement. He had the eye and judgment of the trained observer, the detachment of the philosopher, and the humorous enthusiasm of the good Celt. We were both in that state of transfigured being which is vulgarly described as top condition. Those are the rare moments of living which we borrow from the golden age; when every thought is coloured glowing gold with the vigour and fitness of the body, and every fibre of the body vibrates to the joy of the eye and the glory of motion. We were storming up a narrow way out of the world, so high in air that it might well seem a rough causeway up on to the clouds. On our left rolled up the fairylike glacier slopes, opaque white-rolling seas, blue-shadowed and unreal as the clouds, and blending imperceptibly with the blue-white spaces of sky beyond their margin. On our right, remotely below us, the rocks and glaciers hurried earthward, plunging under the green covering of the woods and the sun-misted levels. And up the solid rim dividing and uniting these two worlds climbed our stairway, "peak beyond peak, precipice beyond precipice, and gulf beyond gulf." The broken pyramids, in defiant succession, seemed to be fighting to fling their summits clear of the rising flood of ice and snow, which splashed up from the ice seas on our left. Here and there the pent-up seepings had even burst over the lower rock escarpments—only to hang, frozen into motionless cornice and startled back-frothings of snow, above the disclosure of the ten-thousand-foot further plunge beneath them.

What more could we ask for? Always ahead there loomed above us the provocative outline of some crest or wall that might just check our instant pace or even prove too much for our craft. Always close at hand the countermove suggested itself unfalteringly: the straddle up the sheer crack, the balance along the wrinkle, the shuffle up the ledge, the cat-crawl over the steep glacis of ice-mortared rubble. Or again it might be a balanced stepping along a snowy knife-edge narrower than the boot, a cling with claws and axe low down across the almost vertical back of a cornice, or a smack of the axe, a stamp of the claw and a clutch of the knee up the rough-coated fluting of some iced or snowy buttress.

We moved like one man. If the hazard of a passage suggested caution, we roped together until the suspicion was allayed. But this was seldom, and only for short stretches. We could rely upon our combination for a twofold discretion and anticipation, and upon our single selves for safe performance.

Practically all good games exist simply because a circle or sphere, if struck or thrown, moves—and moves in a calculable fashion. Games give us the greater pleasure the more rapid and the more rhythmic the movements of propulsion or pursuit which they demand from us, and the more these movements are complicated by nice calculations of timing and direction. In climbing, we ourselves are both the striker and the ball. We enjoy *all* the moving pleasures, of the calculation, of the stroke, and of the full flight through space that results, over an infinite variety of surface. I should not like to describe our progress up the ridge that day as a series of light, elastic contacts with the rock, alternating with smooth, curving flights over snow; but in memory the rugged accidents of the struggle have subsided, and left something not unlike this impression.

As we came up towards the summit of the Courmayeur Mont Blanc, the rock ridge finally disappeared under the invading waves from the snow seas. Small cornices gave place to large ones, grey-green ice-bolls and frozen snow-sheeting confused the footing and handhold, and we put on the precautionary rope.

The great rock-faced head of the Italian Mont Blanc was now close above us. Away to our left, and making almost a right angle with our ridge, ran the white, humping snow-back that joins the lion head to the highest white cowl of Mont Blanc. The tide of glacier upon our left, welling now up to our level, filled the elbow between these two ridges and surged on to their walls in white slopes of rounded, easier curves. Across this ice

bay, along a high contour, and not over the last point of the Italian summit, lay our direct line to the principal dome. It was no day for sweeping in monumental by-peaks. Forsaking the last lift of lion pyramid, we set out along a high wave-line of the immense ice sea, and crossed the bay towards the final ridge.

Behind us, perhaps an hour away down our ridge, we could see Josef and the Doctor making good progress. Years and the great height were telling a little upon pace, but they were winding, traversing, clinging, and striding up without pause. Their voices came to us; but they looked impossibly small beetles, creeping among and over red-black cathedrals and over and round white fortresses. Indeed so much out of scale were they with their surroundings, that the eye seemed hurt in the effort to focus them, as if it had suddenly been applied to the wrong end of a telescope. We eased our own pace a little. It was not yet half-past eleven, and we should certainly reach the summit in plenty of time to get down by daylight. The function of the 'auxiliary engine' had been performed: the most cheerful of the valley prophets had allowed us six hours for this ridge, and we had taken barely three.

Personally I was not sorry to contour over the ice slopes more gently. Up to fourteen thousand feet I had never been conscious of any effect of height; but here, where for almost the first time I was travelling on the fifteen thousand line, I was sensible of several effects, not so much physical as what I may call nervous. The extraordinary feeling of height and isolation was daunting. On the sharp peaks of previous experience, where one could look down ridge and slope on to the world, as it were along connecting lines, and place oneself by the challenge of neighbouring peaks, the sense of altitude had remained relative and comprehensible. But here, held up against the sky upon the cone of a floating ice globe, where the dead white domes and dead white rolling plateaux seemed to be suspended in space with nothing visible above and around and even below them but expanses of blue-white cloud and white-blue sky, there was nothing to correct the desolate impression of absolute solitude and height. We seemed to have left the earth, to have clambered up over some edge, and to be drifting off into space upon a moon of half-frozen nebula, as lifeless and as remote as the real moon itself. I felt impelled to move more timorously; to plant my ice-claws soundlessly so as to avoid offence to the cold inimical silence. As we ploughed along the western flank of the white summit-ridge, and turned down once and again in order to traverse on

steep green ice below the roots of projecting rock fangs, I envied H. O. for the first time his greater security of claw, and rather clumsily cut nicks in the ice for the better planting of my own. Mountaineers sometimes call this semi-numbness or lowering of the vitality 'the psychological effect of height.' I was not sorry, even at the time, just for once to experience it, and to learn to interpret the term.

The ridge sank into the slow dome which has its culmination in the summit. The sun had played havoc with the snow surface, and we toiled heavily up the wilderness. The day looked bright about us, and the sun glittered meretriciously among thin ravelings of silver cloud, fine drawn over the blue vault of the sky. But the air must have been charged with invisible vapour. No heat penetrated to us with the pale light. We trudged over this frost-land in deadening, windless cold, so bitter that the lungs ached to breathe it. We understood something of what explorers mean by arctic cold: my face and my eyes grew sore, and my temples throbbed with the pain, as if brushed against blistering cold metal.

Gladly we stamped on to the final snow lift; and still more gladly dropped at once over the edge of a deep white bear-pit in the snow, all that was left of the sometime observatory. A sleek Zoological-gardens bear, accustomed to nourish its dreams upon the British public and its perambulator, would have fled from our pitfall as from a nightmare, if I looked, and doubtless I did look, as nipped and brown-withered and wrinkle-eyed and frost-rimed as H. O. crouching opposite to me in the square snow box.

Whatever our looks, we had every reason to feel glad in spite of our aching temples. We had carried through our obstinate purpose; we had made a thoroughfare of the last and greatest ridge of Mont Blanc. Although the experts had prophesied that, if we got up at all, we should spend two or possibly three nights out upon the peak, and although I myself, knowing nothing at all about it, should have said that four or five o'clock must be the earliest hour at which we could hope to reach the summit, it was now only just noon. We should have all the afternoon before us for a right enjoyment of the descent. As we ate, chillily, the usual conglomerate of sweetness, oiliness and frozen glove-woolliness, we smiled across at one another. No words were needed to tell us that without hitch or hesitation, and blithesomely by ourselves, we had just ended the most magnificent spell of high mountaineering that could ever have rejoiced the hand and

heart of man. For myself, I was as content to recognize then as now that I should never lead a nobler ridge or share in a greater climb.

Doubtless, for the interest of the story afterwards, there should have been hazards and escapes. But I never missed them from the action, upon those ascending heights of princely adventure. And the true satisfaction of the mountaineer comes when he can look back upon doubts resolved and difficulties mastered during long hours of high, sustained effort, always with a safe margin of time in hand and some strength and craft in reserve.

Half an hour later arrived Josef and the Doctor. Peering from our pit we had watched their approach from far over the snow spaces—two ridiculous human dots, small as black poppy-seeds, declaring themselves presumptuously, by movement, upon the stillness of white-blue motionless snow and blue-white motionless sky. His own courage and skill and Josef's care had brought the Doctor through, in spite of the effects of cold and height and pace. And in admirable time. It may be recorded here that when two days later, under similarly perfect conditions, our ascent was repeated by one of the Doctor's rivals, H. Pfann, his party reached the summit at five p.m., and had to pass the night in the Vallot hut. A week later, when it was again repeated by his other rival, Dr. Pühn, who was also completing his last four thousander, they only arrived at six-thirty, and also, of course, had to take refuge for the night in the hut. But our Doctor, the senior of the three, joined us in our pit at half-past twelve.

We gave him ten minutes' breathing space; and then we all ran blusterously down the snowslopes for another twenty minutes, to the more real shelter of the Vallot hut—that odd polar burrow under a snow hummock which must have saved many lives and soothed many tempers in ill weather. We had to smash our way through a curtain of large icicles, and cut the door free of its ice frame. The interior gave us a change to another sort of damp dead cold. But we warmed it up in time with body-heat and breath; and spent an hour and a half in eating and smoking indulgently, and in encouraging the Doctor's spirited exchanges with the unjettisoned residue of his butter and alcohol.

After that, always and all the way, downhill. As we cantered down over the snow hillocks towards the Dôme du Goûter, we dropped out of the stratum of cold air. Our headaches lifted instantaneously, like tight-fitting hats blown off by a gust, and the sun poured a new dancing vitality into our legs and bodies.

We slipped left-handed over the edge of the snow world,

and clattered down a promontory of easy rocks, frothy with snow icing, on to the upper icefalls of the Dôme glacier.

That glacier, like all other glaciers in that hot season, proved to be 'open' and difficult beyond all precedent. Great systems of open blue crevasses reached almost from bank to bank. On a steep glacier it is naturally more difficult to find a way down than up. Little can be seen of what lies in front under the white curves, and nothing can be made certain until we are actually peering down over a wall or into a chasm. We soon discovered that the mountain still held cards to play, and our prospect of reaching the comfort of Courmayeur that night receded tantalizingly. We roped up, all together, and flung ourselves into the game at express speed. We wound, we zigzagged, we doubled back endlessly; we crawled down hanging bridges; we balanced down and across frail connecting splinters of ice; but above all, we *jumped*—we were always jumping, hour after hour, from any sort of take-off, down and across rifts of indefinite width; to arrive on jarring and uncertain footing, on bosses, cofferings or pockets of snow, on penthouses, perpendicular spillikins or sloping modillions of ice.

Josef led us with brilliant instinct and at a tempestuous pace. In front of me the Doctor bounded and poised and rocketed with astounding mobility, and in very finished style. Only, he was still obsessed with the deep-rooted Courmayeur conviction that Mont Blanc from the south, and especially by the route we had just made, was *not* to be climbed without at least the tribute of one involuntary night out. And again and again, as we paused for the consideration of some intricate manœuvre over an ice-waterfall, or retraced our steps at a gallop up and off some 'cut-off' of an ice-peninsula, the shadow would sweep across his beaming, bearded face and invade his gleeful voice, and he would press us earnestly to take heed in time, and at once set about choosing some suitable ice-pot or snow-dimble for a bivouac! As it was still early afternoon, as the comfortable-looking, speckled levels of the Miage glacier were already in sight, seen deep below over the titubant edges of our descending tributary glacier, and as our quite adequate party had only to go downhill somehow, somewhere, and sometime in order to reach them, the Doctor's counsel was probably intended rather to 'avert omens' than to be taken seriously. But the effect on Josef was eruptive! He quivered indignantly all over the neat small framework of steel and whalebone that serves him for a body, and muttered shrilly to his tutelary deity, the "Sacred Strawsack," that rather

than sleep out on such a glacier, in clear weather and in sight of port, we would chop all our axes into pegs, and lower ourselves from them upon lengths of rope, so long as axes and ropes and we ourselves lasted!

Two enormous bergschrunds almost made this necessary. Upon one of them the upper lip, or ice-cliff, upon which we found ourselves, overtopped the lower by some fifty to sixty feet. I remember the detail of the passage somewhat vividly, for I was descending last, and had to linger over it long enough to dislike it.

I was, firstly, expected to jam down a vertical ice-split in the surface of the upper lip, holding myself into it by pressing my hands and claws against opposing ice walls. When the crack grew too narrow for a further downward squeeze, I had to step out into space round its vertical ice corner, get a foot on to the crumbling crest of an ice-flake adhering to the wall, balance out on to this, and then shuffle along its comb with my face and hands rubbing against the sheer blue ice that dripped over my head. Where the flake ended I turned half round, and had to jump sideways and downwards, perhaps six feet, on to a snow-covered boss of ice that stuck out yet farther down the wall. When I had arrived on this, had heard and felt its crack and hollow shock, and had avoided falling backward off it into the huge blue gulf below, I was advised to crawl down a steep ice-gutter of hard blue glass slanting downward across the face to a second, larger platform.

Here there were head-room and space to turn, and, happily, a fairly level take-off; because the last jump, of perhaps seven feet across and twelve feet down, had to be made diagonally over the schrund and spirally downward on to a promontory of ice projecting from the promised land of the lower lip. I was well coached from below; H. O.'s cheerful tenor assured me that I "could do it on my head," and that it was "no distance!" But nowhere else in the world do men look so immeasurably far below you as when you view them from the upper lip of a big crevasse, which they have passed and which you have not!

I arrived upon the promontory, still spinning like a peg-top from the rotatory movement imparted by the crookedness of the leap—or so I was prepared to affirm. I had been prepared, too, a few moments earlier to affirm that, as I shuffled along the ice-flake half split from the blue wet wall like a shaving of bark, I had had to stop breathing, so as not to topple myself out of balance by inflating my chest against the ice wall.

The glacier kept us agitated and active to the last. No one could certainly have asked for a more sporting second half to a long day. But about tea time, say half-past five, the mountain threw its hand in, and allowed us to clamber off the glacier, with muscles spent and slackened like overstretched indiarubber, and up the rocky right bank to the refuge under the Aiguilles Grises. We treated ourselves to tea, out of deference to the hour; and felt once again gradually creeping upon us the thickening of hearing and the dulling of sight, the flagging of the spirit and the general deadening of the personality which never fail to overtake us somewhere upon the way of our return from the heights to the valleys.

A long tramp lay before us still—all the level jerky miles of the Miage glacier. By them we should return south, below and past the mass of Mont Blanc which we had been so busy traversing northward and up in the skies all the early day. And then the Val Veni and the Val d'Aosta.

We swung into the long stride philosophically. Down the easy moraines of the glacier rhythm became mechanical, each foot drawn automatically on to the tread just vacated by the foot of the man in front. In such rhythm the effort of walking is scarcely conscious. Our eyes were free to follow the panorama of the walls of Mont Blanc unfolding for our passage. Buttress after black buttress, as we passed, thrust itself up in titanic support of the unseen world of snow domes above. Glacier beyond glacier broadened round its rock screen, as we approached, and flung over at us out of space from under a white rim of ice-fall cloven and pinnaced against the sky. Already we ourselves were walking in deep shadow. And our darkness moved higher and higher up the enclosing walls, chasing the last golden splashes of sunset off tower and ice-shield. Farther and farther up, until there was no more light or colour on the precipices; and over the dark trough of our valley the narrow sky, still half luminous, seemed to shut down closely like a lid.

The moon came out as we wound through the fir woods of the Val Veni, making silver ghosts among the branches, and bringing back something of the unreality and the sense of dream-like movement with which she had transfigured our start up the great ice couloir twenty hours—or was it not twenty centuries?—before.

From the clearings we could look up again at the white arc of the col Emile Rey, at the shadowy shrug of precipice above it, and at the immense irregular skyline that reached up athwart

the moonlight to the Courmayeur Mont Blanc. A gigantic corner-stone of earth, exceeding the measure of earth's rounded edifice, and immured therefore a second time, for all its excess of height, in the temples of the clouds. And to think that we had passed over all of it since last the moon shone! Simply as a physical effort the distance looked impossible. Here was the span of my stride on the brown, springy track, a bare three feet. There, the eye travelled up those dangerous almost upright miles of rock and ice and difficulty, as they curved upward even beyond sight to where, under the night, the silvery lining of a cap of cloud was reflecting the moonlit but to us invisible snow-dome of Mont Blanc. To think that this little brittle compass-span of legs had traversed all that impossible measure of distance and height, and as much again beyond; and not in a space of years but of hours! How many tens of thousand times had each infinitesimal foot been aimed and swung and set! The mind shirked the calculation, and settled into comfortable amazement.

The moonlight, after all, made any miracle seem probable. The beat of our feet thudding down the brown earth track set itself to a psalm of exultant peace. Really, it was not only worth while, it was a very glorious thing to be a live being for a few years, if living meant an occasional day of this kind—if pure effort could create such a leaping pride in strength, such a delight in the nearness of friends, such deep contentment in the memory of the harsh, sane touch even more than in the lovely appearance of hills.

To this refrain we walked and sometimes talked together all down the long valleys and through the evening; and we found ourselves by half-past ten in Courmayeur, almost with surprise.

Courmayeur and the prophets welcomed us wholeheartedly, and with a surprise even greater than our own.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT SIDE OF THE GRÉPON

What if I live no more those kingly days ?
their night sleeps with me still.

I dream my feet upon the starry ways ;
my heart rests in the hill.

I may not grudge the little left undone :
I hold the heights, I keep the dreams I won.

GREAT artists have claimed that their world held no higher pleasure for them than the sight of a white expanse of wall, which they were free to fresco in imagination with creatures more perfect than any which their hand could afterwards execute. And yet they tell us that the creative impulse of their craft has driven them impatiently to the doubtful attempt. To a mountaineer there is no less enchantment in the prospect of a fair wall of untouched rock, upon which his fancy is at liberty to trace innumerable ideal lines. And he can claim the same indulgence as the artist for the impulse which compels him, as a craftsman, to take the earliest opportunity of translating his perfect vision into mediocre performance. A mountaineer's failure, at least, botches no surface. Even his success reduces by no more than the breadth of a single line the expanse left virgin for the enterprise of his successors.

When I passed along the Mer de Glace under the great precipices of the Grépon during the summer which followed the ascent of them which I shall be describing, their ardent memories were veiled behind unseasonable ice. They looked as if no cloud had ever clung successfully to them, much less a sequence of solid boots. The traces of our conflict and of our companionship were as lost as the echoes of our voices. My first thought was of satisfaction : it is opportunity for new achievement which each succeeding generation needs to develop its initiative ; not the evidence, nor even the memory of the achievements of its predecessors. An untroubled mountain face does more than any number of cross-looking diagrams to provoke enterprise

But with the afterthought came a regret: the impressions of that day had been too virile, the exploits of our leader too heroic, for me to wish for them no longer continuance than that of our own short memories. It would have been consoling to think that in some other dimension all that was good in them might be still surviving, adding something to the impetus towards bold adventure, unperceived itself but imperishable as a movement, like the ripple-rings of a raindrop on the face of the sea.

The best product of human life is its relationships. The faultless affection which may exist between two faulty natures is in itself a separate personality, and one more deserving of remembrance than either of the characters from which it emanates. For our human relationships, and not for ourselves as individuals, we would, if we could, claim immortality. In that same dimension would survive the relationships, likewise greater than ourselves, which we can establish with less animate nature, with ennobling presences such as mountains. And there, too, would be gathered the separate personalities, better semblances of our own, created during our unselfish moments of combined action, under circumstances of danger or of wonder.

We all needed a breathing-space that season. Our previous adventures had left us restless, our nerves edged by the long, close companionship and by the strain of common excitement. A break of singleness and silence among unreceptive peaks suggested itself as the remedy. Josef Knubel followed in the slow train of our luggage round to Chamonix. H. O. Jones and Todhunter disciplined themselves by crossing Mont Blanc once again; this time with Henri Brocherel, and by the Rochers Rouges. For my own tonic, I idled up under the trees to the col du Géant; and the next day sped peaceably down the icefalls and the long glacier to the Montenvers. Even on the higher plateaux there was little snow of concealment for the crevasses. The frank difficulties of the open séracs were only a diversion. These lonely days, when they come of their own accord, are the reward for many years of apprenticeship. When eye and hand and foot can be relied upon to act together for our security all but automatically, the hour may come when we can feel free of care for the way, free to sink our consciousness wholly in our surroundings. This is the supreme joy of solitary wandering—self-forgetfulness: the merging of our own identity in every detail and fanciful suggestion of our changing environment.

It was something of a 'sentimental journey.' Every jagged



(Red Tower)
GRÉPON

skyline high in the blue afternoon was an old hunting-ground. Almost every vista opening up the sunny side-glaciers was associated with some camp of uneasy sleep or nervous night-grey start upon new adventure. The mere sense of irresponsibility was exhilarating. There was no reason for sitting down on one island-rock in the wilderness of ice more than upon another; so to sit down or not to sit down anywhere seemed equally daring and delightful. There was no reason for getting up again at one moment rather than at another; so to get up, or to lie back more deliberately and stare into the confusion of peak and sky, had all the excitement of an inspiration. There was no reason for going fast or slow; so pace and mood went in step, unnoticed and refreshingly ungoverned. In the morning the craning head of the Aiguille du Géant had seemed to be exercising a prying supervision. But after a grown-up game of hide-and-seek with its inquisitiveness down the big séracs, both its head and the game passed out of mind among new trivialities. On the lower levels of the ice sea even that last Alpine instinct, for the 'clock,' dissolved in luminous vagueness. Noon-glare, sunset, moonlight, any obscurity would serve for the last miles of rambling over the starred cracks in the great unreflecting mirror, and down to the Montenvers. Not to have thought consciously for hours of wholesome activity is happiness. But rarely can we light upon a way so nicely aligned between excitement and monotony as to render un-thought possible.

Reunited, refreshed, and all five in company, we moved up to a former camp, an oasis of sand, lichen and moraine above the glacier and under Trélaporte. Todhunter, in his record of our climb, has reflected upon the absence of soup that night, and upon the lack of sympathy we showed for each other's lonely searchings for lost objects in the dark moments of the next day's awakening. Indeed, we were bemused with weeks of mountain air and action, drowsy with the magic of the stars. The stars never seem so near as when we are lying alone at night on the breasts of hills; when we half waken in the dark to feel the stir of the dawn-wind filling the lungs of earth under us like the sighing of sleep, and lifting, lifting us nearer to the laughter of the skies, closer to the discovery of the secrets which the stars are whispering across our faces, and through our half-open eyes to the still dreaming world.

An unseemly and unlikely party, we yawned the wrong way over the shoulder of Trélaporte, and slipped our sacks and sat down at the head of every greasy grass gully. The dank night-

moisture of verdure-clad rock is an offence in the dusky hours, slimy and ominous as estuary mud. The craving of insufficient sleep was upon us, an oppression peculiar to times of rude health and placid thinking. In the war-years who noticed how little or how broken was his light, listening sleep? But how often in the holiday weeks of the Alps has the soul ached, even in dreams, at the prospect of hearing the fateful knock of the "two-handed engine at the door," and longed disgracefully even for rain to postpone its interruption. When we came up over the shoulder, and on to the small hanging glacier below the Grépon precipices, we set down our sacks in a formal row, as if for ever; and sat upon them, gazing hopelessly into a heartless world. I know I wished desperately for a miracle: that something would dissipate the rest of the party, painlessly of course, into the landscape, and that—incredible thought!—I should be left undisturbed to droop as I sat into exquisite sleep. But the momentum of our uncertainty as to each other's degree of demoralization drove us on to our feet again at last, and up to the great bergschrund under the Grépon rocks.

And then and there the story of Galatea was repeated—as it always is among mountains if our lifeless limbs, heavy at starting as unquarried stone, can only hold on long enough against lethargy and shadow. But, for once, it was not sunrise which breathed the miracle of life into them. The bergschrund which I had twice before crossed slightly during earlier explorations of the cliffs, had fed on unusual heat and waxed fat; and now it kicked. Its upper ice lip, scornfully up-curved some twenty feet above our heads, defied us to bridge the chasm at any point. This was too much. We might be ready to turn back at our own inward whisper of 'sleep.' But to be defied by the morning gape of an initial bergschrund barely a few hundred feet long——! We hurled ourselves into a very difficult turning movement, up a sneer of adhesive snow which prolonged the ice-grin on to the adjoining cheek of bare rock. The effort tuned us up. We cut steps on a diagonal back to our left, up the all but vertical ice above the schrund; and at last got our feet on to the good red rock. Then, like a slow-coiled spring released, we went off with a bang.

There are few tracts that suggest a moon-world of primitive matter so starkly as this glacis of the Grépon, a welter of red and yellow and ashen slabs, water-smoothed and tip-tilted at vast irregular angles. We had roped at the schrund; but we had worked too long together that year for the long rope to exert

its usual check upon pace, or even upon consciousness. The great Red Tower, which stands upon the slabs like a sentinel, and which marked the limit of all previous explorations, was soon close above us; and then behind us. We sped on and up, following the indefinite gutter of a lost but lively little stream; until the knees of the four-thousand-foot precipice bumped out at us, and we had to draw breath for the beginning of our serious work, and make our choice of line for the day.

There are no allowances for 'first faults' on this ascent of the Grépon. As it was hit off in the beginning, so the line soars straightly with us, to whatever end we have merited; and there is only one right line. Above us, and a little to our left, a prodigal cascade of yellow slab swept down from the sky-ridge. Away up, and more to the left, these slabs were bounded by a greyer rib, which seemed to mount far towards the highest summit. Above us, and on our right, a second, slighter rib slanted up towards a more northerly peak. Up one or other of these two ribs lay the only climbs offering any chance of continuity. But the rib above on the right did not lead to the highest summit, —and it had been climbed before. Somehow or other we must make a lodgment on the lower end of the left rib; and that before we found ourselves floundering among the yellow slabs, adrift upon the smooth billow of precipice already beginning to interpose between us and our solitary grey-ribbed hope.

Something was wrong with our leader. All down the rope came the shiver-on-the-brink feeling. And indeed the prospect of taking hold, of committing ourselves finally to the wrestle with those gruesome slabs, might dispose any mortal to shrink rather than to start. We seemed to be compromising, pit-a-pattering. We had traversed tentatively to the right; and now back again to the left, on a wrinkle-scramble of least resistance. This brought us near to the lifting rim of a huge gash down the crags; and beyond this again we could look across at a flat-backed chasm. It was a double line of vertical defences, which divided us grimly from the butt-end of our rib of hope, still far above us on the left. It looked to be time to get to grips with this crossing. Josef was climbing petulantly. This was the crucial point, obvious to him as to us. But he did not even pause before fighting away up the wrinkle-crags to the right again, keeping up a cross-clatter of ejaculations with Brocherel which smothered any murmurs. His very fashion of 'launching away' made one smile: it was so clearly not 'meant.' I looked up. On the line the men were resuming we might spend a number

of invaluable hours in forcing a few hundred feet of tautening slabs ; and then we should be immobilized upon a blank and ghastly wall, as helpless as cows upon ice. If we could not rush the defences on our left, and cross on to the grey rib at this the latest possible point, the game would be up—and we should not. It was no use arguing : Josef's back, as he scrabbled up the slabs with unnecessary emphasis, told me that he knew what I was thinking, and thought the same, but that having decided in himself that the traverse was hopeless he was taking this method of demonstrating the futility of the whole climb early in the day. His variable hill-mood had every ground for mistrust. This aspect of the Grépon resembles the inner surface of a broken potsherd. It looks to be concave throughout its height ; and the milder curve near the bottom steepens progressively upward, to an overhanging rim at the top. If our insectship were already crawling up the milder angle with difficulty, what measure of daylight or of clingfulness would serve to see us up the incalculably worse beyond ?

I unroped, and traversed warily upward to the left, over the rock vallum, and across the fosse ; until I could look down into the second chasm or couloir. It looked an obvious channel for falling stones. So I waited for a few formal seconds, to see if any fell. Meanwhile I scraped clear a knob on the brink, which seemed designed to hold a doubled rope for our sheer descent into the chasm. Once down, the traverse across the polished back of the trough should go, I thought ; and there, a little above, over its farther wall, rose a series of sloping ledges and fillets, such as, with one or two permissibly doubtful steps, must lead us up, and up, and out on to the promised landing of grey rib !

I chuckled inwardly ; and called to Brocherel to come down and across from above, and to H. O. Jones to come up and across from below, so as to give me enough rope for the experiment. Josef of course joined us ; and while we arranged the rope round the knob, and I lowered myself into the couloir, he cast a dangerous eye over the position, and remarked blandly that it was all very well to get down, but how, if we were beaten higher up, were we to re-ascend this sheer wall without the rope from above ? It was a pertinent question—although had his mood been normal the matter of return was not one Josef would have bothered about. I glanced up, and round, examining every discoloration upon the smooth rock chute as I clung. It would never do to be caught out at the start of such a deliberate schism : more was at stake than a mere ascent of the Grépon ! Then, I waved my

hand reassuringly—as if I had seen it all along—towards a miniature lanchard high up on the far wall of the couloir. It was an unassuming stance even for these rocks; but so placed that a second man could from it safely belay the leader for his re-ascent of the ‘cut-off,’ if we had in fact to turn back. Josef subsided gracefully. He did not believe, I am sure, that I had discovered that bracket before I had started the traverse; but the gods were evidently fighting for the other point of view, and that was sufficient for his mountainy temperament. From that moment he flung himself into the struggle as if certain of victory. The backwash from his new confidence overran the whole party. For the rest of the day we could be content to concentrate each upon our own delectable holds, and watch with admiration the battle between the midget and the mountain raging above our heads.

So,

to the hills,—
 For earth hath this variety from heaven
 Of *pleasure* situate in hill and dale—
 Light as the lightning-glimpse, they ran, they flew.

Our party fared indeed better than the Miltonic angels; for the Grépon hurled no mountain-tops upon our heads. For all that, the traverse of the couloir was not easy—the holds were but filmy; and we raced across it with one eye upward for the stones that did not fall. And yet, anything seemed kindly as an escape from our initial experiences on the yellow slabs.

The ascent up the far wall of the chasm went nobly. Short as the distance which we had ascended appeared, as compared with the perpendicularity still awaiting us above, we had already been involved among hollow slabs and hollower doubt for five and a half hours. So we settled ourselves on the genial jut of the grey rib, and breakfasted, and talked of past successes to keep up the psychic barometer; while the often-pictured ‘Crag on the Grépon’ reared its warning head over us, high above on the further left. If ever a speculative eye wandered away up the waterfall of smooth slabs from which our rib emerged but hesitantly, we recalled it, with a bright dutiful smile upward at our one thread of hope, that suggestion of linking notch and crack which seemed to connect our perch with the remote impending skyline.

We crept onward, up the rib; and came almost at once upon a triangular level platform fitted into a rock corner, so restful and singular that we unanimously voted it a name—

the 'Niche des Amis.' Josef, still trying to preserve his dignity of gloom—in the seconds when he remembered it !—said it would do well for our night-bivouac when we were turned back. We left it by a memorable crack, a forty-five-foot right-angled and vertical corner, with just one upright slit for the hand to shift up in, and a convenient leaf for one thrusting foot.

Above this, chimney and slab and flake followed in too lavish and rapid succession to allow of orderly recall. Often the rock was actually overhanging, but it was magnificently rough and firm ; the usual hold was an under-pull for the hands and friction for the feet. H. O. Jones has written of this section : " At nine we were off once more, and from this time until the summit was reached at two, the climbing was always difficult, usually exceedingly difficult, twice verging on the impossible, but—it was undoubtedly superb ! " It would be impossible to describe our line in detail. It cannot be mistaken, because there is no alternative. All that need be said is that we seemed to be clinging up a one-and-only feasible life-line wavering over the very break of a thunder of hopeless slabs. The strands of this life-line of cracks were stretched so thin that after every panting fifty-foot struggle I hardly dared look upward at the next loom of rock breakers, lest, this time, a link might have snapped, and one of the ninety-nine probabilities, of a holdless section intruding, might have at last obliterated our hundredth chance, the persistent little miracle of the connected chain of trifling faults.

Above us the contracting, steepening uprush of russet slabs crested over against a dead-blue sky. Below us they sank abysmally, to a white dazzle of glaciers, through which the chequered moraines broke darkly, like tidal rock under a shallowing crawl of surf. Had there been time to think, that overbearing menace of height above us might have become insufferable. But warm, gritty flake and crack and angle took us comfortably by the hand and foot, and drew us on and up, with little nips and prods of encouragement. Even hard-trained muscles grew tired of their own satisfaction. Often enough they rebel against single feats beyond their strength. But I remember no other occasion upon which they creaked and murmured at the mere continuance of varied and pleasurable exercise within their powers.

Our rib-wrinkle struggled upward long and gallantly. We clung to it as to a happy straw of disturbance parting the glassy planes of a waterfall. But where the Crag on the Grépon showed close above on the left, and the peak began to collect all its smooth

ferocity for the violent jet of its summit aiguilles, the riblet gave up the fight, protesting in an odd little spurt of rock which projected from the machine-cut slabs like a camel's hump. It was a last hummock of support, with a white saddle of snow thrown carelessly on behind it. Here we assembled; and Todhunter, who was climbing last on the rope, materialized for us again agreeably. For many hours—so steep and continuous was the angle of ascent—he had been for me only the glimpse of a small kid-gloved hand, fluttering out of nothingness deep below Jones' heels, and fingering delicately some spare coils of rope which he was taking in as he climbed unaided—to save time!

As we sat, and fed, and thought, we heard a thin unearthly hail; and looking upward, discovered in impertinent movement between the stable rocks and the still sky far above our heads the white face-specks of a party, craning over from the tip of the final tower to peer down upon us. Little wonder that they descended to Chamonix to spread report of a 'mad tea-party' clustered far down on the Mer de Glace face, certainly there for the night, and may be for ever. Some of us may even have shared their opinion, as we roosted upon our frivolous little hump. I hesitate to pronounce upon the emotions of an intelligent fly, as it sits on a picture-nail in a cathedral and looks up at the vaulting and down at the pavement; but I am certain that our outlook must have been much the same. And then—we were not flies!

However, Josef was by now keyed up well beyond any Grépon 'pitch,' and he rocketed off the saddle again, in the silent rush of inspired movement which best interpreted his mountain heart. A sequence of difficult cracks brought us up on to a narrow band of rock, which wound horizontally across the sun-scorched face, like a string-course round the contour of a campanile. On our right the ribbon ran out into gracelessness, upon extravagant precipices. We followed it to the left, over a blind corner; and it led us, Grépon fashion, to the foot of a lean chimney slitting cleanly and darkly up the cataract of slabs. For some two hundred feet, in part overhanging, it split the sheer wall above our heads. Then it appeared to evaporate upon lurching space, prospectless.

I skirted along the ribbon a little farther to the left. I thought I saw some chance of a hazardous traverse across to the fantastic needles crowning the main ridge, which was now sweeping upward and past us on the left on its way to the summit.

But I could not discover any direct line up our wall other than the chimney. Since that time Franz Lochmatter has proved me wrong. Had we gone yet a few steps further round the bulge, we should have come upon an easier line of broken rock bending right-handed up the slabs, and rejoining our line above the miscreant crack. Possibly I was over-preoccupied with a fear lest, if we followed the ribbon too far, some of us might be tempted to escape across on to the skyline ridge, and so we should fail to complete our ascent by the Mer de Glace face of the peak. For the rest of the party it was sufficient that there had, hitherto, never been more than one line of advance, and that there before us—the chimney offered it!

We built a small cairn on the shelf at its foot; and strung ourselves out up its gripple narrows. At two-thirds of its height the chimney breasted out in an overhang. Josef passed me down his sack: an objectionable contingency to which I was now so accustomed in our partnership that I made a precautionary practice of rarely carrying one myself. He then wriggled up past the bulge, to some invisible ledge. Brocherel's bigger shoulders, broadened by his sack, jibbed so long at the same spot that I had time to grow cold on my eagle-spread of damp nick and nodule, and to begin to speculate on the displeasures of a return down the perpendicular vacancy revealed between my legs—always an enervating trick of thought. Jones and Todhunter 'joined' me; that is to say, Jones' smile widened across emptiness immediately under my right boot; while, as I looked down over the plumb-line of his back, I saw between his parted heels a gloved hand daintily rising into view, and still flickering its neat coils of rope.

In the meanwhile, Josef and Brocherel were audibly engaged with something particularly ferocious out of sight, and some sixty feet above my head. Josef's exclamatory shrills trickled down to me, and as I knew them to be his modal reflection of the penultimate phase in desperate climbing effort, I was induced to notice how ludicrously the rest of us were placed to resist any incidence of the unseen. With the realization came the little fretful shivers and contractions of the muscles over the ribs and chest which give us the impression of the fluttering breath of fear. There followed a worse and very long moment of deep gasps, the rasp of scraping bootnails, and the tac and chink of the axe-point nicking into hard rock. The ultimate phase was in progress! The 'axe-cling,' and silence, were symptomatic of the calling up of Josef's last reserves! Axe-climbing was a

freakish art, perfected by Franz Lochmatter and himself in the wild autumn weeks when the last tourist had departed, and they stormed in reckless company over their home-peaks after probably illicit chamois. I had seen them at such times glissading in rivalry down rubbly rock bluffs, at angles that the rest of us might hardly attempt on the better surface of smooth ice, and then pulling themselves up the rock again, where there was neither hand nor foothold, by arm-twists on their nicked axe-points. But now, in our present exposed position, even to think of such acrobatics as in progress beyond the dark jut of invisibility above our heads was—distasteful!

Hours seemed to pass; so many, in seeming, that the little movement of the sun suggested that it too had been standing still to watch in wonder. A breathless croak of relief, and of summons, announced that Josef had arrived somewhere from nowhere. Brocherel followed it with a hoarse seamew-wail from the unseen that I was to join him, and that he was 'good' to hold the rope, but not to help me with it. Below, we were chilled, and perhaps a little ruffled. When it came to axe-clings I preferred at least to be in a position to keep a reflective and upcast eye upon the dubious proceeding. I pushed off up the crack in a questionable humour that matched its own, and wrangled with it pugnaciously; until I arrived at the constricted, overhanging section. But there, try as I would, I could not force my shoulders, with the heavy sack, past the cloven breastwork:

Under the weight of mountains buried deep . . .
 Their armour helped their harm, crushed in and bruised
 Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain
 Implacable, and many a dolorous groan,
 Long struggling underneath, ere they could wind
 Out of such prison—

I let off some feelings by saying it would not 'go' loudly and emphatically. Josef would have treated such formal protest in his usual manner, tightening the rope abstractedly and turning his watchful eye tactfully inward upon some mountaineering dream unconnected with the surface situation. Brocherel had a shorter experience, and translated the protest into a bald bellow to Josef—'Monsieur ne monte pas!' Fine shades of temper were clearly wasted upon such crude interpretation. So up I wriggled. The chimney gave out upon a narrow gutter, under a brow-beat of slab. Up its frontal bone ran a perpendicular furrow; and straddled across this, where the brow-beat gave back a little above, Brocherel was balanced precariously on

rudimentary holds. Just above his head a great dome of cliff boomed out in a steel-smooth overhang. Of Josef there was no trace. For a second I hardly dared let myself believe that he had escaped out of the trap; for the only conceivable exit lay up to the right and round the curved profile of the overhang, well above Brocherel's head, by the way of a pendulous noselet of rock which slanted into space from the underside of the dome. But there was no leisure even for incredulity. The rope ran up that way, out of sight. Brocherel was already making room for me, by hanging on to one knob with one nail while I moved up on to his 'holds.' Then, with grateful lightness for so large a man, he stepped up on to my shoulders, and thence on to my head, steadying himself with his hands against the smooth side of the noselet above him. Soon he was clinging with his knees over its aquiline tip; and then, out of my sight, and exclaiming and scrabbling furiously, and more and more remotely, up some hidden angle of impossibility.

H. O. and I repeated the preliminary tactics. From a comparatively restful standing-place upon his capable head I squirmed with my knees up and over the odious parrot-beak, only to find myself, beyond it, committed by the rope to the precipitance of the unutterable slab which the overhang above had been hitherto concealing from us. There may have been air-pockets over the smooth face of that all but perpendicular slab: there was certainly no other perceptible irregularity. I slipped with my knees, slithered with hands and elbows, and flopped like a fish against the haul of the tight, thin waist-line. Just below my futile boots the slab slid over into space. Above my head it towered evilly—until in a high dark angle, between the outward leaning cliffs, it died away upon a sort of corner-bracket of hope. Out of this dark corner peered Brocherel's pallid face; while Josef's dark-puttied legs dangled down beside him, the rest of him hidden behind a belaying splinter of rock.

Exasperation was my only conscious feeling: a surprise of anger at the place being even worse than I had allowed for; irritation at my helplessness; vexation with Josef for attempting it, and vexation with my own vexation—for after all it was the best-worst way out of a cheerless position. Death may be as certain from above a hundred-foot drop; but imagination and the view down a three-thousand-foot wall can make a far more flustersome business of it! I might not pull myself up the rope with my hands—fatal temptation!—for that would prevent the men above from hauling it in, and so increase the risk with every

foot I might gain. And apart from the rope there was no hold at all. I could but scuffle, and try to spread myself adhesively, like butter—melting butter, on a tilted plate!

A microscopic crack sloping steeply upward appeared above me on the left. I reached it. It was too small and shallow to admit even a finger-tip. But here and there in it I could see tiny dark spots, where Josef had snicked in the point of his amazing axe, and dragged himself up the slab by its single support. But how he held himself at that angle, and upon that surface, for the seconds during which he was shifting up the pick to a new hold—only he himself and the sky could know! I marvel even now to think of that lonely fight, far up ahead on the blind, leaning wall: a duel with immensity, uncheered, even unwittingly.

Somehow it was over at last; and I had hold, panting and rope-rumpled, of Josef's dangling foot. And immediately the dread and vexation dropped behind and were forgotten, as is the way of our climbing humours. There remained only a bright froth of relief, and a sediment of annoyance that so stupendous a climb should be marred by one 'impossible' section.

I saw to it at once that the spare rope should be sent down for the others, so that they might be relieved of some part of the unreasonable terrors of the slab. To get off the corner-bracket, and up the stooping angle between the cliffs, meant yet another short but severe struggle. And then we were out on a sociable sloping platform, where we could meet again, and rest, and talk out our remaining breath.

Josef was beyond any safety-valve of speech. If he attempted a compressed remark, he sizzled like an engine under too high a head of steam. To have checked him long might have been perilous; and at the first signal he was away with a leap that floated him out of sight in an instant. 'The bottom of the mountains upward turned' could not now have smothered his soaring energy, much less any lighter obstructions which the Grépon had left in its skyey armoury. Mountains are as human as Milton's angels. We rarely find in climbing that they repeat a supreme resistance twice in the same form. Their capacity for offence is limited; and from a concentration of difficulties which has failed to check our advance they seem to require time to recover. Only if their offensive has succeeded, and they have thereby forced us to retreat, do they appear to be ready to strike again immediately, and harry our descent promptly and viciously.

We avoided the provocation of saying so aloud, but I think that we all began to feel, after this astonishing passage, that the victory in some form or another was, after all, to be ours. At the worst, we should not now have to return by the way we had come. The pinnacles on the mounting skyline of the main southern ridge were challenging us always more closely from across the brown precipices on our left. We could surely escape out on to them, if the wall of the final tower above us proved, on trial, to be as inaccessible as it looked. Josef jodelled at us, out of an invisible kink in higher space. A lively, aspiring chimney of some hundred and twenty brisk feet, supplanted our muscles again after the halt, and discharged us from its muzzle in a shrapnel-shower up a following of steep slab and crack. Different anatomies can never reconcile their estimates of the same rock climb: an oblique, semi-detached monolith, some fifteen feet high, up which four of us, with our longer arms just jammed in its only crack, swarmed all unnoticed, appeared to Todhunter the crux of the whole ascent. For the first and only time the rest of us were gratified by an intermission in the neat coils of rope hunting below our heels, and the gloved hand seemed constrained for once to abandon its 'time-saving' fashion of pursuit.

"It may be an excellent rule in rock-climbing," Todhunter records, "to keep the arms in reserve for some supreme effort that is never required, but on the final five hundred feet of the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon the rule is best honoured in a continuous breach. However the end was now at hand. Another fifty-foot chimney, and the party were looking down on the Nantillons glacier from the well-known gap between the Pic Balfour and the summit. The great rock wall had been climbed; but the summit of the Grépon had still to be reached."

We were now gathered at the foot of the final problem—the upstanding red citadel of the Grépon. The crests of its southern arête notched the sky close above us on the left. Unanimously we had swung out to the left, and up on to the breach under the Pic Balfour, more, I think, to enjoy the contrast of a wide view and open breath than with any idea of finishing the ascent from this side. The magic of the view from alpine heights owes much of its effect to contrast: all that we see from a summit is ablaze and a-tingle with the relief of our own recovered freedom of sight. We had plenty of daylight in hand, and an increased confidence to bring to the examination of the impressive attempt before us. On the far, northern side of the citadel, both the crack of ordinary ascent and Venetz' original cleft were safely

out of the way of our temptation, cut off from us by the sheer flanking walls. Above us on the near side, as we stood in the gap, we could see the corner masking the Dunod chimney, by means of which—and of a doubled rope—the descent from the summit is usually made. We might be driven to ascend by this line as a last resort. It had been done with the help of a lasso ; and could therefore, probably, be done without it. But the unsurpassable climbing on the gigantic red-brown slabs deserved an independent finish of its own. We were resolved, if possible, to end as we had begun upon the Mer de Glace wall, and make a new and through route from base to summit.

We redescended from the gap on to our wall, and returned round above the familiar abyss ; scrambling along and up the sharp edge of a flake conveniently split off the face of the citadel. The flake brought us to the foot of a rift up the centre of the wall, the only flaw in the last defences. If I remember rightly, this rift corresponds to that of ordinary ascent up the northern flank ; the two being formed by a single cleavage of the vast block that constitutes the summit. But whereas the crack on the farther, Nantillons, face mounts as it were the convex back of the rock wave, that upon the Mer de Glace face is sucked up into the underside of its inclining crest.

Josef and Brocherel manœuvred, exclaimed and gritted off the spiny flake, and up into the splayed foot of the overhanging cleft. Brocherel, with his big head crushed skew-wise into his diaphragm by the rock, sprawled Promethean legs over invisible supports on the sloping floor of the gutter-shoot, and offered a pessimistic basis for Josef's acrobatics. The rest of us, clinging in a row underneath them, up the razor-edge of the flake—limpets or gargoyles above the profundity of red wall according to the point of view—followed their evolutions with cricked necks and tightening chests. The overhanging chimney was short. It looked to have something of the character of a Gothic niche for a saint, surmounted by a canopy. The back of the niche was cracked, and the crack was prolonged upward and outward through the canopy-bulge.

From a crouching balance on Brocherel's shoulder Josef hooked his axe-pick into the crack, high up at the back of the niche. With this for hold he wrestled upward, with his feet using press-holds against the outward-sloping walls of the niche, to a more secure position under the pendentive. Bridged and straddled high above our heads, he tried again and again to reach out and up, and squeeze some part of one hand into the

thin crack above the projecting bulge. Josef's reach is short try as he might, writhe and grit furiously, he could not gain a secure hand-cling. Even the axe-pick refused to grip the fissure since the rock, undercut below it, left the axe-shaft unsupported. The obstinate efforts were renewed time and again, until watching became intolerable. For a curious relief I glanced downward under my knee, where it rode the rough red edge of the flake and dissipated sight more comfortably down the infinity of brown depth, and away across the white concord of glaciers—a level of restfulness so remote that even its ascending murmur seemed not to belong to our present.

A new sound from above recalled me. I looked up. Josef was in the throes of a last daring inspiration. He whipped his axe upward, balanced himself audaciously outward, and with lightning speed wedged the point of the axe-shaft into the crack above the bulge of the canopy, so that the axe-head projected horizontally and frailly into space, between our heads and the sky. Except for its sensational circumstance the next manoeuvre looked like a simple gymnasium trick. Using the wedged shaft as a horizontal bar, Josef dangled clear of the niche, and swung himself up on to it as adroitly as a Japanese juggler, until he was standing upon it—over us and nothingness. The rest of his climb looked to be a triumphal wedding-glide up a widening smile of appreciative chimney. But for minutes afterwards while we shouted our admiration to all the echoes of the mountains, I could hear him fighting for breath, supine upon the flat summit overhead, as surely Josef never panted on a rock before.

During our long suspense below, the rest of us had been agreeing in interrupted mutterings that for, perhaps, the first time in our lives we were all conscious of muscles frankly wearied out by the day-long persistence of unrelenting difficulty. Hope, sunshine, excitement, glorious rocks, training, and tried companionship, all the fuels that make of strength an inexhaustible flame—we felt them all still burning brightly within and without. And yet we had to admit that for anything beyond a certain routine of movement our machinery would no longer work. That any form of exertion could actually exhaust our muscular reserves, while the spirit and the will still remained vigorous as morning, was a novel discovery; and to be forced to recognize it at such a point both rueful and comic. But the small corrosion of steel, whalebone and mountain fire warring with all the earth forces above our heads seemed to be aware of no such limitation. As a manifestation of nerve, skill and power, Josef

issue from the niche would have been remarkable on an 'hotel boulder' after an idle morning. Performed at the end of some ten hours of very exacting climbing and exploration, over a void that seemed to swallow the nerves into its yawn of hostile space, the feat seemed to us almost superhuman. The whole ascent will, I hope, often be repeated; now that the horrific slab has been eliminated there is no finer rock climb in the Alps. Knubel's crack will yield, each time more readily, to longer arms; and our first estimate will, of course, be progressively reduced. But I have little fear that the applause with which we acclaimed the first passage will ever be thought exaggerated—by those at least who 'lead' the crack themselves.

We had plenty of spare rope, and the actual height was not great. Brocherel entangled his bulk in a network of stout cord, made an athletic effort to shatter his way through the canopy, and, kicking and ejaculating, finished the rest of the ascent after the fashion arranged for their visitors by the monks of Meteoro. Then the rope came down for me, and Josef had recovered sufficiently to beam down over the edge at my struggles and give them an unusual share of his discreetly abstracted attention. I was allowed to try the crack my own way; but, scraping and gnashing, I could no more emerge from that saintly sloping niche that if I had been respectably sculptured in stone and erected within it. Finally I tied on all the loose ends of rope within reach, took a firm hold of any others that promised connexion with the ultimate, and arrived on the summit, safely enmeshed. The others wasted less time, and joined us—equally 'meteorically.'

The flat table-top of the Grépon must be the meeting-place of numberless happy memories; but it can never have supported a more reminiscent and more luxuriously prostrate gathering. The sun had waited for us, and met our eyes on a long level of golden placidity, as welcome as had been its tranquil support during the fighting hours of the day. All the world seemed to be open, shining, before our thought, even into its most sombre corners of cobweb and puzzlement. A philosophy of life which is based upon getting admirably tired, and then dreaming the universe into shape through the coloured moments of reaction, is, probably, open to criticism. But it may be that some of us, of the less intellectual habit, require some ten to fifteen hours of hard rhythmic exertion, before our ill-balanced energies of mind and body can achieve the working harmony or symmetry, the equable outlook and in-look, which are essential for our appre-

ciation of the few glimpses into understanding permitted to us—and then only in our instants of self-forgetful rest.

As we drifted down the ordinary descent of the Grépon, the rope which still bound us together on the obverse of our great wall served as a reminder that there was still earth under our feet. The sense of a good hope fulfilled and of every healthy desire of the body contented might otherwise have persuaded us that we were wind-travelling, upon the buoyant wings of a serene heart. Is there any other human experience so complete, so rounded off in its actions and reactions, as a great and successful mountain climb? In snatches we recalled to each other the impressions of the day, as they fluttered into memory at their pleasant will. But all the time we were looking out over a choric movement of evening mists, at the last tableau in a pageant of gorgeous light, a pageant in which we ourselves had some unexplained but sympathetic part. In mood, at least, we were one with that higher and changing illumination. Our grumbling band who had lagged up Trélaporte the same morning must have belonged to an earlier, earthlier existence, of drab spirit cluttered in dross.

Doubtless, I argued, as we paused on the glacier to coil up the rope, the philosophers of the street would call our state of mind a hallucination. Our poignant adventure, our self-sought perils on a line of unreason to the summit of a superfluous rock, have no rational, or moral, justification. Our consequent luxury of feeling has, therefore, no virtue or reality, except in an equally irresponsible imagination. But again I knew, in every fibre, that this was not so. And fortunately the purposeless splendour of the sunset, transforming the Jura into a coloured fairyland under our eyes, suggested an answer sufficient for the mood. For the sunset, too, was unreal, with neither moral nor object, and the effect of its beauty upon ourselves was but another product—if a more universally accepted one—of a romantic convention. And if both the sunset and the climb were unrealities, and their effects negligible or improper, the sincerest part of our personalities must belong to the same worthless category, for they were patently and wholly responsive to the unreal emotions which the sun and the mountain were producing! I felt I could be content to be irrational, or even immoral, in such good company. Every purified particle in me proclaimed that a good climb—and this had been of the best—was, for me, only a good thing, and as genuine an influence as my sort of nature deserved. Sufficient of life, sufficient of discipline, sufficient of thought, for some of

us, in the circle of mountain, sunset and new sunrise : sufficient not only as motive for our activity, but as inspiration in our time of rest.

Along the windings of the forest path down from the Plan des Aiguilles the last, motley plumes of failing light trailed through the branches and about our feet, feathers fallen from the wings of contentment which had seemed to bear us from the glaciers. As I watched them altering in darkness, and contracting to the twilight glimmer of the valley streams, I resolved that there should be no anti-climax : for me at least this completed and complete climbing day should form the close of the most perfect season of our alpine lives.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST ALPINE CLIMBS

Mountains are moods, of larger rhythm and line,
moving between the eternal mode and mine.
Moments in thought, of which I too am part,
I lose in them my instant of brief ills.
There is great easing of the heart,
and cumulance of comfort on high hills.

DURING the June days preceding the war I came up into the Alps from Italy in the hope of catching an early spell of fine weather, and haply of finding some remains of good winter snow to help us on the great ridges which we were planning to attack. These were the Mittellegi arête of the Eiger, which had been descended but never ascended, and of which the weather decided in the end that we were not worthy, and the west ridge of the Gspaltenhorn, all but the last great unclimbed ridge of the Alps. The Mittellegi I had examined with Josef Knubel, and we had decided that we could climb it, without also any of the mechanical assistances which were being projected locally. The Gspaltenhorn ridge had been in my mind for many years, having been introduced there originally by that source of so much mountaineering inspiration, a conversation with Percy Farrar.

Siegfried Herford was to join me for his first season of greater mountaineering. As a climbing companion I already knew him to possess the four gifts—reliability, judgment, appreciativeness and reticence. To balance age and youth in our party Josef was to bring Hans Brantschen, a straight-backed young chamois-hunter. He had skied with me in the winter, and I had liked him for his modest self-confidence. Great things were prophesied of him; but it was almost a chance which decided me. I saw him jump down an eight-foot wall on to a narrow ledge. He did not lower himself by his hands as most of us would have done: he dropped cleanly from his feet and alighted in the arrested curve of an ideal athlete. The choice was justified.



Western Ridge

GSPALTENHORN
from the Büttlassen

Josef and Hans joined me at Brieg on a sunny morning. We tramped up to Ried for the Bietschhorn; and before we reached the hotel we were sopped in a hopeless rain-storm. With rain roaring on the roof it was useless to start up for the hut overnight; so we left the usual word to be called at midnight.

We trailed out through the darkness in a bath of cloud, a warm bath of just that die-away temperature which chills us with despair as we step into it. They were woolly clouds, too, with an ominous 'run ink' in their lower edges that foreboded more rain. We were too spiritless to stick to the track, and made straight up the slopes of the Bietschhorn so as to strike the end of the south-west ridge. It was a wet and bedraggling scramble for untrained legs. The ridge when we trailed on to it gave us only a mild pleasure; but at this, my fourth attempt on the peak, there was no question but that it must be followed out to the summit. An inch or two of wet snow over all its rock holds made the only difficulty, and we did not put on the rope except for a few parade moments past a cornice near the summit.

We lagged into a descent by the north ridge. Whereupon an electric snow-storm burst over us, and roused us up—once again—with all the unnatural incitements of sizzling axes and buzzing hat-hooks. We muddled somehow off the lower ridge, in up-blasts of snow which formed drifts up our sleeves and under our eyelids; and exasperated, flagging, and feeling myself altogether too old and stiff, I crawled down the soggy crags, and back to the hotel. The guides kept at an unsympathetic but well-calculated distance from me; and I felt like spraining an ankle on purpose, in order to convince them of their heartless—but again most discreet—neglect. For a training day, in fact, the Bietschhorn was too long, after a year of arm-chair writing.

But the next day beamed sunnily on better disciplined spirits and muscles. By eleven o'clock we were tramping up the Telli-thal pastures, past the sunbrowned chalets, and knee-deep in forget-me-not and pink campion. Higher, we waded through fallen sky-patches of gentians in four different shades, through sulphur anemones, three contrasts of viola, and white and fulvous blossoms none the less fragrant for remaining at that time anonymous. Lastly, as we skirted the higher glaciers, soldanella laughed up at us under the hot sunlight, breaking through its bright winter bubbles in the valley-wind to dance above the rainbow edges of melting darkening snow.

Upon the glacial plateau of the Petersgrat we walked through a fringe of rain: rain which, as we pressed on, dried into fog, and then dissolved again in snow-flakes. But it was hot under our packs, and we tramped forward over the snow in vests alone. We were going well; and for all the soft footing we reached the Mutthorn refuge in time for afternoon tea. It was no use thinking about the unpropitious weather; so we sat round the stove and gossiped, with stuffy intervals for food and sleep.

For a day there was nothing to do but watch the steady fall whitening upon the glaucous ice-bergs outside the window. In all the library of illustrated Swiss and German literature I only found one passably pretty picture and no single joke that could even foreshadow a smile. Possibly the humour was lost in the broader jesting of the weather at our expense. We were waiting for a chance to get on to our Gspaltenhorn ridge from this southern side where the hut made the most convenient base available for an assault. But we never even had a view of it.

On the second morning, for exercise, we rambled back over new snow and under snow-cloud to the edge of the Petersgrat; and were rewarded by a very lovely sight of the Bietschhorn. The clouds filling the valley parted in front of our feet, forming a long tunnel of shadow; and set in the grey oriel at its far end we were looking out upon the faultless white pyramid of the peak. It blazed under a single direct ray of sunlight, and its keen and marble whiteness was mellowed by just that hint of sun-gold which gives their peculiar beauty to the temples on the Acropolis.

Upon our third day of detention our provisions began to run out. We determined to abandon the Mutthorn as too advanced a base for such weather; and waded on over two feet of snow across the Gamchilücke, and down some nice hazards in the icefall to the new Gamchi hut, called the Gspaltenhorn hut. The guides went on down to Gries for foodstuffs; and so left me to that most impressive of experiences, a time alone among high alpine ranges.

In sunshine too bright to last I wandered across the glacier to the west ridge of the Büttlassen opposite, passing on the way the ruins of the old comfortless shelter. It was memorable to me as the place where I had not slept some years before. Marcus Heywood and I had then lain the night out, for lack of space, on the moraine. In the morning darkness we had bathed in the water-spray over the cliffs, and spent the rest of the day less profitably upon a scorching ascent of the Gspaltenhorn. It

had been uneventful : and even its heat would have been forgotten but for the luminous relief we found in occasional dives and scoops into a large tin of exquisite, icy, golden grenadines.

Among the lowest pinnacles of this ridge of the Büttlassen I dreamed out the afternoon hours. It was a day and a place for a sun-bath ; and under the watery burning light I lay and watched the white semicircle of mountains at the head of the glacier, their white robes of new snow seamed and bordered with a leafage of argent ice. Down all their precipices the avalanches stuttered and droned continuously. I counted as many as seven rushing simultaneously down the face of the Morgenhorn. The dull detonating roll of wet snow thudding upon snow boomed across to me from the glaciers at their bases, collecting echoes as it came. The snow-spread was waterlogged ; and under the glare it cascaded like hill-torrents in spate.

Three moving dots appeared upon the glacier far below my ridge, and passed again quickly out of sight, making the white solitude seem more profound. At the high end of the rising glacier before me the snow curve of the Gamchilücke cradled a dipping break of blue sky between two peaks. And over the glittering curve long silking clouds of toneless white crept and drooped, clinging down the glacier-fall and snuffing with monstrous snouts across the ribs and hollows of the Morgenhorn. Wherever their shadow passed the avalanches shrank from the noisy game ; only to begin again by fits and starts after the cold muzzles and chilly breath had moved on to a safer distance.

When the sun began to leave me I climbed higher up the crags of the Büttlassen, to get a view down the valley northward. The glacier clouds followed me upward into the lifting sunlight, wreathing higher about the peaks, and covering all but their summits with folded mothlike wings of torn wet silver.

The evening-watch ended with a sunset—with *the* sunset. I could see now where the frith of glacier between dark rock walls below me ran out into a shallower valley, widening out towards the northern horizon. This valley while I waited was changed to a space of fallen sky. Leviathans of vapour cooped between its shed-lines coiled and heaved and twined upon one another, spraying the sunset light from their shoulders in every shade from dull amber to fire gold. At moments a dozen of them would be spouting together, angrily, in transparent fountains of sun-shot mist. And again, heavier dragon-heads sun-gilt and more opaque would thrust for a while above the confusion, weaving blindly : to subside, uneasily, upon new eddies of light-

drenched cloud. Far beyond them upon my left a castle of rock jutted blackly ; and behind it, where the widening valley met the sky, a solid band of inky cloud covered the disk of the sun. But the last light of the sunset was uncontainable. It flowed round and, as it seemed, even through the dense edges of rock and shadow, saturating them with glowing colour, and then flashing along the riot of golden foam straight up the glacier, and up the cliffs, to where I stood. Above the sun-rush the quiet evening sky arched in a reflecting lake of electric green. And upon it grey-gold boats of cloud floated motionlessly, secure in their height from the valley-currents which bred strife among the fallen companies of heaven.

Because I was alone I still remember every change of light that evening. And for the same reason, no doubt, I have not forgotten the small anxieties and uncertainties which multiplied about my solitary return to the hut across the glacier in the dark.

The guides rejoined me there ; and on a clearing day we went up the Gspaltenhorn, for occupation and to have a look along our west ridge. There was deep and fickle snow. But we were up in three hours, and back on the ' lücke ' or pass between our peak and the Büttlassen in another fifty minutes. I thought we might as well go on from there up the Büttlassen, as this would give us a sight of our ridge in face. To vary the usual line we decided to make a first direct ascent of the Büttlassen edge, over all its towers. This route decoyed us into a very highly-gearred chimney-climb. On its final overhang Hans seemed to dawdle so long that I began to have doubts about him. But when my turn came I took forty minutes to surmount the place even with the protection of the rope. Josef found it as hard, fortunately ; and I do not yet know how Hans did it. But he tore off both stockings in the struggle.

Snow had begun to fall again before we had left the pass ; and we reached the summit of the Büttlassen in less than two hours, and still in falling snow. Slowly and damply we came down by the west arête. This also was a first traverse ; but it is an obvious line, of ' pestered and rommaging ' rock. It consoled our eyes if not our legs that for half of the two hours which we spent upon it a herd of chamois made the pace for us attractively, morris-dancing along the rugged flank of the ridge. The long afternoon we spent in the hut ; while the weather steadily worsened into night.

Still in snow the next morning I plodded down to the Griesalp,

and there met Herford. We waited until nightfall ; and when the snow changed rather unimaginatively back to rain again, we walked up through it to the hut. Rain and snow rang each other in and out, and persisted through yet another day ; and as the hut was confined we spent the alternate hours in spurting out on to the nearer ridges, and in returning to dry first ourselves and then our clothes before the wood fire.

Our many inspections of the Gspaltenhorn ridge through the cloud-breaks did little to enliven us. I have never found in climbing that over-much inspection does. From a distance new obstructions are perpetually declaring themselves : the ways of turning them are only discoverable by exploration, or from close at hand. The higher the view-point we reached, the deeper did the gigantic notches in our projected ridge-line look. I had already given up the idea of traversing round the towers between these notches on their far, southern side ; and from the slabs on their near side avalanches spluttered testily down all the day, to be swallowed up in the gargantuan couloirs of the face below. It is truly a terrific face of rock.

When we examined the skyline of the ridge in its discouraging detail, the first white shoulder, rising from the Gamchilücke, we thought should go. There followed a wall, behind a conspicuous black needle, which Josef disliked. Thence the ridge, serrated and white-combed, would probably carry us to the top of the first great Red Tower or Tooth. There must follow a shattering descent into the first gap. Out of this we must presumably climb direct, as the second tower did not look as if it could be turned by its huge face slabs. Supposing the summit of this second tower gained, we should look down over the worst passage of all. The second gap is a deep scimitar-shaped gash slashed crookedly into the sharp ridge. The more of it we saw, the smoother, more undercut it appeared, as it split the mountain profile against the sky. The summit of the third Red Tooth beyond, if we ever got out of the second gash, connected agreeably—by contrast—with the mountain-top.

The level of the ridge rises but little throughout its length. To traverse it would, therefore, be something like climbing along the top of a fortress wall, cloven and jagged by heavy shell-fire. And the rock was, manifestly, of the worst quality. The most enterprising guide in the Oberland had told me the year before that the traverse would require a thousand feet of fixed ropes ; and he had himself turned back without even attempting the first rock wall above the pass. In fact the

absence of any serious attempt upon this famous problem, the last great untraversed ridge of the Oberland, perhaps of the Alps, a challenge to the hordes of bold mountaineers who filled in summer these popular valleys, could only be attributed to the baleful appearance of the two great 'gashes,' as seen in outline from the ordinary way up the peak.

Josef was gloomy, and fell back upon chilly generalities, such as, "Every ridge must be climbable, if you have time and weather," and on his usual "We have never yet been turned back except by storm, but——!" and it was an emphatic 'but' in this case. Hans, as be seemed his age, was silent, but quite undepressed.

The seventh day of the siege came; and something had to be done. The dreen of hail and snow-drizzle upon the hut-roof was becoming irksome. The Wilde Frau faced us lower down across the valley and the glacier. Its black eastern buttress, supporting the high white plateaux which on the north surround the Blümlisalp group, suggested a ladder of escape. No one, we knew, had yet used it to make a complete ascent of the Wilde Frau from this eastern side.

In a snowless interval of morning we crossed the glacier, and found a hunters' track on to the butt of the cliffs. As a climb the ridge was barely interesting. But snow covered the doleful rock; the storms began again; and the nature of the ridge, a raised rim to the mountain-face, with a great precipice falling on its south side above which we occasionally hung and clambered in suspense, kept us hard at work to advance at all. Josef hated it, and I had used up a year's reserves of moral force before we were done with the ridge, and could turn to the relief of a battering snow-soaked descent. Happily for our good humour another herd of chamois, with their absurd and fascinating kids, performed amazingly on the crags below us, streaking to and fro across our edge, and charming the guides into the same ecstasy of pursuit which draws a dachshund into ludicrous chase of a hare.

The only admitted success of a mediocre day was the sunset: another wave-dance of golden valley-clouds, under rays of rufous and stammel light,—rays which stirred and sparkled the misted surface below our feet as though they had been themselves winds of motion. Herford and I watched from the rock before the hut. These are the generous moments of height: which belong to height alone. And the Alps spent them for us magnificently in that last summer.

The night cleared. But our ridge had now to be left for at least three days so that the new-fallen snow might harden or descend. To make a pleasure of the necessity we started off on one of the most varied of high alpine walks, the crossing of the Petersgrat, the Lötschenthal and the Beich pass, to Belalp. In the dark, upon rock traverses and stumbling snow, we overtook and soon lost two Swiss mountaineers who had started before us. I do not think they succeeded in passing the dangerous labour of snow-crevasses up to the first pass, and we found their Zeiss glasses in the icefall on a later day.

Sunrise met us enchantingly upon the smooth snow-curtsey of the pass: breakfast, desirably, at the Mutthorn refuge. Over the white upland glaciers of the Petersgrat we tramped on; and down to the sunlit loveliness of flower-meadows in the Lötschenthal. We went hard, but we rested orientally. Josef left us there, in a siesta among the wild flowers, and trudged down to the Rhone valley bent upon some chivalrous quest of our luggage. The rest of us woke up in course of time, and buckled to the steep wall of the Beich pass; which was shining keen-edged as frosted glass before us, high above the green valley and against the rain-washed sky. Under the crest we had some pretty traversing upon almost sheer but inspissated snow; and Hans mocked at my greed in annexing upon this wall the only passage of 'guiding' in the long day.

Down the far side we glissaded in lingering flights of peace; and then crunched convivially down the Ober Aletsch glacier. Every bend here marked the turning to an early adventure, upon the Lonzahörner, the Aletschhorn, the Fusshörner and above all the Nesthorn. And when we came out upon the gallery over the Rhone valley, and began once again the weariness of the zigzags up to Belalp, there were the echoes of so many friendly feet out of the past preceding and following us that I forgot for once the proper tribute of abuse. Twelve and a half hours we spent upon our high-level ramble; and no hours were ever better spent. The greater the pleasure that Herford, who in his first season might well have been impatient for chosen peaks and big climbs, enjoyed them if anything even more than I. The summits could wait. This was what he had come to the Alps for—what only the Alps could give.

For a night and a day we quartered at large and bathed in the little Belalp lake, with intervals of visits to the familiar chalets. Then, since it had now held clear for two days of our waiting, we ran down to the Rhone valley, sped round by train,

and tramped up to the hut. And, while we tramped, down came the rain again.

The eleventh day of the siege : and we passed it in slippers, morosely watching from the door scuddles of sleet and flocks of baby snow-squall quarrelling up the glacier. All day behind this cloudy squabble a newly-constituted legion of avalanches hissed and grumbled off the Morgenhorn and Blümlisalphorn. The uproar was incessant ; and through the rifts we amused ourselves by picking out favourites among the wild cataracts, and backing them to finish first on to the glacier. To two Swiss gentlemen we were grateful for the loud laugh which alone can relieve an over-occupied mind. They had been caught by a snow thunder-storm on the Gspaltenhorn, and now asked us to recover for them from the summit their axes, abandoned in precaution, and—a naval telescope, one metre long. It was the precise length of the telescope which delighted us ; and the mystery of taking it as a companion upon steep and heavy snow-slopes, on a day of storm.¹ Through the evening and night Josef and Hans dug one another awake with happy guffaws ; and ‘one metre long’ became our catchword. Well, it was dreary weather, and some of us had had a fortnight of depressing disappointment and internment.

One curious thing we noted at sunset, though we hardly dared breathe it aloud. For all the storms which had harried it, our great ridge above had grown no whiter ! It really seemed as if, owing to some freak in this exceptional atmospheric disturbance, the temperature had remained warmer at the higher altitude. Snow and rain below had fallen only as rain above.

That night it froze, starrily. I lay long awake listening for the beginning of the fatal rustle on the roof, coughing to cover it if ever I thought I heard it, and bracing myself for the moral push it would surely require to urge the guides out for such an attempt in such incalculable weather. But when three o’clock discovered a clean darkness still pricked with stars, they were the first to hasten our going. It was to be only an ‘exploration,’ of course.

The north face of the mountain was before us : its crest—our ridge—dark across the sky, and descending suddenly to the Gamchilücke upon our right. Choked with inaction, in a paling

¹ Years afterwards, from M. Paul Montandon’s narrative of his remarkable second ascent, I learned that this telescope had been taken up for the purpose of examining the very ridge which was baffling us. A little luck with the weather—and all the laugh would have been theirs !

gloom, we started to scamper across the glacier. Josef had marked a flaw where we could get on to the rocks towards the western end of the north face. The deep snow had made us give up our first plan, of toiling up to the Gamchilücke and thence turning along the easy snow crest. We saw that we could reach this crest, below the point where its real climbing began, more quickly by a subsidiary rib and hollow up the north face. I should say at once that, difficult as it had been to examine the ridge in any detail, we found at the end of the climb that we had followed, with only slight modifications, the line which Josef had sketched out to me, pessimistically enough, from the Büttlassen. All our later examination had found nothing better, and had only tended to cover this line with critical confusion. Josef's brilliant execution in youth had been supplemented during our years of companionship by very varied experience and by his own observation. By this time it would have been difficult to have found his superior as a reader of alpine 'sign.'

We left the glacier by an open chimney; and above the first cliffs traversed sharply to the right, along iced and sloping slabs and geröll, nervous footing in the dark. So we passed below a rock tower which supports a subsidiary or corner-arête of the mountain, and arrived at the foot of a great snow slope. We turned up it, with the subsidiary ridge close and darkling upon our left, until a wide diagonal couloir opened for us in the ridge wall. Here we halted for a few minutes; and then climbed the side of the couloir by snow and easy slabs to the edge of the subsidiary arête. The light now began to help us; and we followed the rugged crest skyward, until it disappeared under snow-plats some distance below the skyline. The snow was stiff, and pockled like shagreen. We kicked straight up it; and came out upon the skyline of our great western ridge just in time to pretend not to see a surly and grudging sunrise.

From our outcrop of rock we could look back, and down the snowy shoulder to the Gamchilücke. Above us was the sensational black needle already mentioned—but which we now saw to be a bluff, for it is not on the line of the crest—and yet further above us the first rock wall, which Josef had disliked. We put on the rope, out of regard for Josef's—and its—feelings, although our nearer view of it hardly justified the formality. It speaks volumes for the impressiveness of the great west ridge, as seen from afar, that even this first easy section should never have been attempted. From the pass to the summit of the first Red Tower there is actually no real check.

To climb the rock wall, we first traversed upon it to our right ; and then turned straight up steep snow. Its second stage or step we climbed up an open chimney, of alternating ice, snow, and rock. We then swung back to our left again up fortified slabs ; and so regained the crest of the ridge above the courteous wall—

And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

The crest was heavily plumed and in part corniced ; but the snow was in very fair condition, and crimped radiantly under an all too hot sun. I gave the weather until noon to break.

The second rock wall, or step—it is impossible to give a right name to these ridge-incidents : from below they look like towers, from above they are seen to be merely ridge syncopations—we surmounted by a chimney on our left. A snow-capped edge then brought us, almost unexpectedly, on to the summit of the first Red Tower, Tooth or Fang. (And again, is it a fang ? It would not seem so if there were not a vast cavity just beyond it. Can the absence of one tooth, one negative tooth as it were, establish the continuations of a ridge on either side of it as positive teeth ? About the second red fang there is no such doubt ; its positivity is demonstrated by the most convincing cavities on both sides.)

It was time for breakfast. The summit of the mountain looked beguilingly near, just over the way, and almost on our own level. We perched, and trifled, thinking in truth of the ' gap,' to come, but talking of the white arctic prospect. There was more snow on the July Tschingelhorn facing us than when I had visited it on ski some winters before.

Then we clambered silently over the crown, and looked down into the grisly, bottomless cavity of the first gash. Opposite to us loomed the second tower, brindled, red-browed, and menacing. One could snap a pebble on to it, but a wedge of eternity seemed to have been sandwiched between. Only when we craned over, from the last leaning ledge, deep below a little thread of white bridge came up out of the void into sight : a floating cobweb of snow, joining at either end two half-seen heights of undercut wall, dividing on either side two depths of remote sun-dazzled glacier.

On the south face practically all the rock of the peak is weathered, corrupt and hopeless. On the north face it is weathered and corrupt. Under certain snow-less conditions, we thought a way round might be contrived upon this northern

side, by descending a chimney further back, traversing along the pendent slabs below our first tower, and so coaxing an entry into the couloir which falls from the little snow cobweb. But for us it was out of the question. By some means we must get straight down the undercut face of the fang, on to the white clothes-line.

A little cranky sconce of rock discovered itself at last, drooping apprehensively from the north-eastern angle of our tower, but as refreshing to the eye upon that barren steepness below as any "purple grape that droops from the desert thorn." To a surprisingly firm spike above the sconce we made fast our long reserve rope. Josef went over; and found a cramped but solid stance on some harder blue ledges about fifty or sixty feet down the wall. I followed. The first twenty feet were a clutch down the loose fretwork of the sconce. Then I had to depend almost entirely upon the rope, and pendled down over the wall-corner of gliddery grey rock. Herford joined us on our blue balks—it was his first experience of this branch of rope-mechanics. Hans, as last man, swarmed down the rope, rehitched the 'double' at the end of the sconce; and managed in the end to induce it to follow him with only one false start.

We were now half-way down the face of the tower, above the gap. A bowed infirmity of edge upon our left slid us down a stage further. Then the wall undisguisedly overhung. The only possible route lay down an undercut chimney which, so far as we could see, ended in nothing well away to the north of our thread of white hope. The top entrance to the chimney was too narrow to allow of passage with a sack. Below, it opened into a shapeless chasm, widening upon emptiness.

We fixed the reserve rope again. I hinted that it did not look as if it could ever be pulled off after us from below. But the guides were now far away, in that tense abstractedness which difficult work often produces in their minds. By the rope we achieved another sixty feet of descent, with little but hindrance from any contact with the rock. Scraped and muscle-racked, I rejoined Josef upon some rough spicules jutting from the face of the fang on the right side of the exit from the chasm. From spike to jut and jut to spike for some thirty feet we traversed delicately down and across the wall, until we could step on to the link of snow. And as we thus approached it from the side it looked less like a cobweb than a leaping column of white foam, frozen and arrested as it lashed through the rift between the mighty towers.

A clunch of sacks made the descent on the rope by themselves ; and their spinning, spiking and riving down the wall overhead set one's teeth on edge. Hans came last ; and of course the reserve-rope stuck. He had had enough of unprotected rope-dangling ; and we could not afford to leave our spare rope behind, with that worse scythe-gap to come. So Josef had to rope-swarm up the whole height again—an extraordinary feat upon thin alpine cord. This time he mastered his old-fashioned prejudice against cutting the rope ; and consented to make and fix a rope ring through which the reserve might travel more easily after his re-descent. The salvage operation took nearly an hour ; and then we assembled under the snow-curl of the little col, for a breathing space. There was, I admit, a certain audacity in not leaving the spare rope fixed above, in case we should be forced to return up the tower. If we had been blocked, as seemed not unlikely, any further along the ridge, our position would have lacked lustre. I can only give the reasons for not doing so as they presented themselves to us. We never did leave a rope behind, as a matter of taste. If we had once begun doing so, on that ridge, there would have been no end to it—but an early end to the rope. We expected to have even more use for it later on. And, finally, what is called ' burning one's boats behind one ' is the strongest of encouragements towards finding another way out in front.

We were now in the first great gash. We had to get out of it by a frontal attack, because we had seen that there was little hope of our being able to traverse round either the northern or southern flanks of the isolated, overweening second fang above and ahead of us. With a thrill of relief, then, I noticed that towards the right-hand or southerly edge of the great wall swaying out at us overhead the crags leaned backward a little. Some embryonic chimneys crinked up round a less precipitous corner. We chose the second chimney. Its first obstacle was more difficult than it looked, an elbow-wriggling overhang. Then we worked rapidly up the steep, scarred cheek, turned the vast forehead behind its surprised left eyebrow, and emerged, not ill-content, upon the crown of the second Red Tower.

We were never a talkative party ; but that was an unusually subdued lunch. The mammoth ridge held us roundly on the tip of its most serviceable tusk ; and it seemed to be champing and grinding our somewhat tired nerves gloatingly against the counter-oppression of space. We had each of us, before

we sat down, snatched one look over into the further gulf, the second gash ; and we had each come back from the sight more studiously nonchalant. Behind us, if we failed to get down upon this far side, lay the threat of a return journey up the two hundred feet of chasmic, decayed first fang. And while we ate and pondered, through the cavities of the ridge before and behind us, the monster began to wind-whistle, as though through ogreish expectant teeth. A film of clouds bred and spread thickly over the glaciers below ; the sun heat altered and chilled under passing shadows. But I can recollect Herford's unmoved voice remarking to the sky that he thought the return up the first tower would all go, except perhaps the mid-height section of grey slab, and that he would like to try without his boots.

We scattered over the top, and began separately to prospect. The more broken tilt upon its southern curve helped us for a short distance down. But below that the wall swooped in, under, and out of sight : and the next rest-point for the eye was the nether-world of glacier, glimpsed through cloud. Facing us was the yet higher wall of the third tower, storm-brockled, ruddy and whorled. The gash which parted us from it was narrow enough : a hundred feet lower it looked jumpable—had there been anything to jump from or to. But it was atrociously deep. Immensely further down, as I hung over the precipice, I could again just see a single white speck, the connecting bridge between the two towers. But, most singularly, the white line did not bridge the centre of the gash : it joined the northern corners of the two towers. I can remember no other such caprice of connexion in the spine of a great ridge.

So it had to be as before ; a descent somewhere upon the northern angle of the second tower held once again our only hope of arriving upon the white link. A very slight hope. Josef was outspokenly despairing : but I still relied upon the line which he had traced in less moving moments. So far it had worked out well ; and to the less tutored eye of faith a knight's gambit somewhere down the north face, with a traverse along rickety slabs in the direction at least of the white col, did not seem entirely out of the question. I recalled for my comfort that entrancing crack which had solved for us the descent from the first tower on the west ridge of the Jorasses. There Josef had swept us over breathlessly and unerringly. But this indeed was a very different setting : dangerous conditions, upon a rock of ill habit, under weather of ill omen.

To start the bidding I moved a little back along the top,

and pointed out a semblance of a gouge down the northern wall. Hans, to my surprise, agreed that we might try it. But this spurred Josef's genius. Down the northern gable he led us, not by my furrow, but from a point closer to the summit. We screwed back and fro down a snow-slimed corner and a groove or two, and then had our strange line clear before us. We were already some way down the smooth north face of the fang. The wall aloof and aloft was presumptively vertical, and all further descent was cut off. But across the face, at about our level, ran a horizontal *filet* of rock, sketching out a traverse feasible if awkward. At the far end of the wall it vanished, not round the corner of the tower, but against a fantastic flying buttress or screen which projected at right angles northward from the corner. So ruinous and casual was this astonishing hanging curtain, that in two places it was pierced right through by windows. One patch of sky winked through it some ten feet above the point where the sketchy traverse ended in the angle made by buttress and wall; the other ogled us from some thirty feet farther out to the north—and over space—along the unstable rock screen.

Josef trod softly across the traverse, climbed into the first rose-window, and his head and shoulders disappeared through it. After some high-pitched exclamatory patois he recorked himself more securely, with his head out on our side; and then Hans followed. But Hans' orders were to get into the second window. He turned the angle below Josef's anxious face, worked out along the surface of the curtain upon inconsequent but stubborn wrinkles, and finally scrambled up to screw himself into, and obliterate, the second sky-patch. It is difficult to give an idea of the oddity of our view of these two figures, jammed through two high 'squints,' in a broken wing of rock trailing from the corner of the dizzy red tower. Above their peering heads were only a few feet of tottering rock comb, and then the travelling clouds. Below them, one intolerable sweep of precipice, to the glacier.

I came next. The order or disorder of events had decreed that I should now for the time be roped to all three comrades. For all that, the traverse inspired me with loathing. I had Josef's abominable sack to carry, my hands were chilled, and for the first time I felt that years must be telling. I crawled along it abusively, for all its romance; and joined Hans, popping him out like a cork through the far end of the orifice. Herford pursued me, with an ease delightful to watch from my

window ; and then Josef began the cork-unscrewing required to extricate him from his spiky hole, and start him along the traverse to our better one.

Hans meanwhile was roping down the far side of the screen ; and so my window was clear upon that side for a view of the next in the succession of architectural jokes by which we were profiting. Here was I, with head and legs poking out either way through the flying buttress of a great tower on a main ridge. By rights I should have been looking down upon nothing but air and the glacier. I was not. Sixty feet below and directly under my window that fabulous little snow-span frisked pertly across to the corner of the third Red Tower. What mountaineer could conceive of such a structure ? Well away to my right lay the line of the main ridge. By twisting my head that way I could look into the stupendous scimitar-cleft across which our gigantic Red Towers scowled and made chests at one another. By every rule that small white link, the spinal cord of the ridge, should have united their mid-centres, and should have been unattainable from such a flanking position as ours. But, here it was : vagrantly attached between the extreme corner of the next tower and the loopholed curtain of rock stuck precariously on to the outer corner of our own. And our window was set unimaginably above it ; and our traverse had led exactly to the window.

No wonder our hearts grew light and our voices loud. I tried to wriggle out through the window with the sack on, and failed. Then I tried head first ; and I should have succeeded, if I had not shied at the prospect of proceeding downward in the same ram-stam fashion to the col. Finally I tried feet first : and then had to perform an acrobat's back-bend in order to get my heels down on to a supporting ledge. We fixed a doubled rope as a security, but the steep descent would have been easy without it. Then I stood on the col, to watch the others materialize. And again I can give no idea of the strangeness of standing upon this arbitrary loop of whiteness above white mist, and seeing their heads emerge through the sheer dark wall sixty feet above my head—Herford's wild shock of fair hair and amused eyes suddenly issuing from a blank nowhere against the drift of clouds. We were talking it over together, in our snow-steps under the little crest, at noon.

Our rough places were now growing very plain. The precipice of the third tower, fronting and overshadowing us upon our right, looked unassailable. We were quite content to leave

it at that. The cyclopean measure of these gulfs and monoliths exceeded anything I remembered to have seen upon high mountains. I felt that we should have to look to the great river cañons for their match : to set the deep gravings and chisellings of the elements against the scale of this their comparable experiment in modelled high-relief. But the third tower, we knew, was joined upon its far side to the summit mass. We had only to turn its obstruction upon the north, where we could see that the great tusk was rooted roughly in the spreading base of the final peak, and so find some oblique route upward to the crest which connected tower and summit.

We kicked very careful steps down the couloir which descended on the north side of our col. The snow here was adhering on a slope of sixty degrees, a rare phenomenon even in such high and narrow couloirs. But its surface was frozen just sufficiently to allow of our using it with all precaution. We left it, along the over-lap of a rock ripple ; and then struck off across the rake of inclined slabs under the tower. After all our arm-pulls on the ridge we revelled in those few hundred feet of icy but dancing and balanced foot-work. We were out of the shadow of the towers at last, on the open face ; and Josef turned upward to regain the ridge, swinging at racing speed up a slant of ice-backed chimney. We varied this by excursions on to its containing ribs : ribs of the kind that I used to call 'crockery,' where one tip-toed and tip-fingered up the cracking rims of egg-shell saucers and muffin-dishes. After the upright plate-racks we had a galloping interval up steep snow. And finally ladder-lengths of protruding and disintegrating slabs stilted us up on to the crest of the ridge, just behind the crown of the third and last tower.

Of course some one had to visit its summit, if only by the backstairs. So I unroped and made a quick ascent of its two eminent horns. From the second horn, overhanging the gash, there was a theatrical view back along our ridge. The foreshortened procession of great icy and spinous towers crowded upon one another, like Atlantic rollers after a gale. My feelings at the sight of them were now very different ; but actually, from this their upper end, the plunging heights and depths looked more savage and inaccessible than they had appeared to our opposite view from the first tower. For the same reason—the eccentric character of this great ridge—we had been half a day ascending a big mountain, and yet all our difficulties had been those incidental to descending. Any party, conversely,

which should try to descend the ridge, would find itself engaged almost exclusively with a series of difficult ascents.

A last sky-way of crag and cornice; and we were on the snowy point of the mountain, after ten hours of very changing fortune from the hut. The guides hailed the summit with shouts of joy. Not because it was the top at last—we accepted those customary pleasures quietly; but because from it, grotesque, lonely and askew against snow and sky, there stuck up a grove of dissolute ice-axes, and in their midst, bowing and posturing like a fashionable preacher to a select congregation, the celebrated three-foot telescope!

Our laughter seemed to scare away the long-threatening clouds. We lunched in approving sunlight, on the fresh snow. Josef draped the axes and telescope round him, until he looked like a second-hand marine-store on trek. We unroped, and rushed gaily for the valley. On the lower slopes, where the new snow was no longer steep or dangerous, Hans cleared our path, carrying with him a travelling wave of avalanche which hid him from sight. And on his harder track we shot down, a thousand feet at each swoop, in long sitting glissades. We reached the hut in an hour from the top. For the rest of the day we sun-basked voluptuously on the rocks, wholly abandoned to a tingling of apricot light without, while the slowly revolving rays of contentment, lassitude and rainbow-dreaming illuminated the past, the present, and the future for us within. They were hours of mere pleasure in being; such as leave no definite memory behind, and only survive in a heightening of our powers of appreciation, a deepening of our understanding of natural and of human fellowship.

And there I suppose the story should end. But the season decided that the last alpine climb should not be the Gspaltenhorn, but once again the Z'Mutt ridge of the Matterhorn. By a coincidence the ascent of this ridge, which has a clear record itself and is now treated as something of a highway, has often been the forerunner of tragedy. I could add seven names to those already recorded in the connexion.

On the following day we had a long and beautiful ramble over the Sefinenfurgge; and down the green alps lively with flowers and with lunes of snow, brown-speckled with pied goats and the tanned faces of their herds, to Mürren. For our hope, we had the white sheer of the Eiger, the dragon-prow of the Oberland, before our eyes. Two sunny days like this, and I

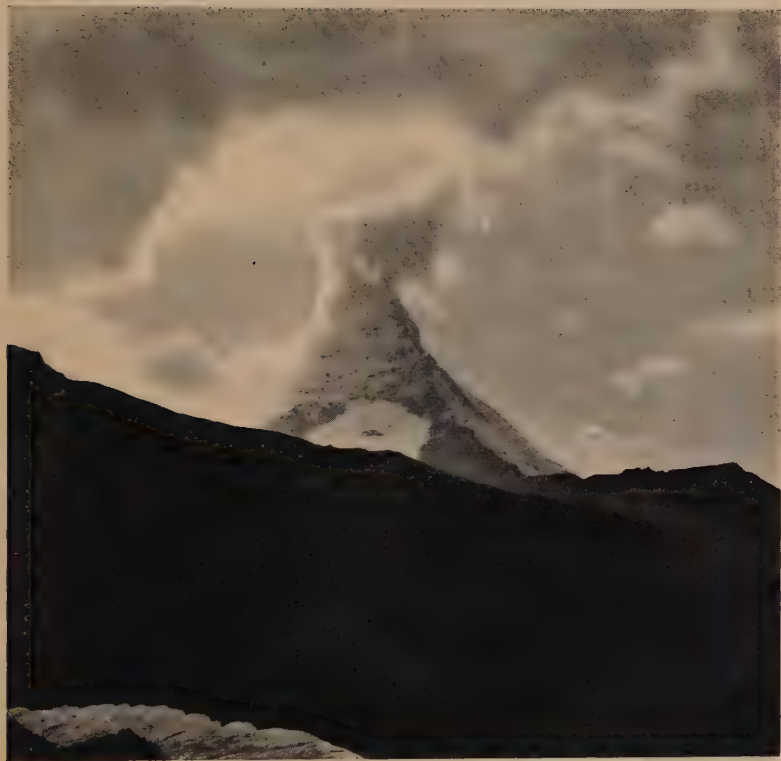
was as certain as one allows oneself to be of anything among mountains, that its Mittellegi arête must fall.

But one whole day without storm was all which that season could spare: the little train shot us out at the Wengernalp, once more in bitter snow and biting hail. We pressed on to the Jungfrau refuge. And there we were sociably snowed in, under burrowing, polar conditions that could at least commend themselves to J. S. Wordie and my cousin Horas Kennedy, who had come up there to test sleighs for an Antarctic climate. We could not borrow ski; so in the end we smashed our way out through the giant icicles, glissaded off the misproud pass in a blizzard, and trudged down to Belalp, and to the valley.

At Zermatt the report and the outlook were not less gloomy — 'not a peak would go for a week.' But out of my window that first night I saw that the Z'Mutt ridge of the Matterhorn, thanks to the scouring of violent winds, remained the one black edge in the chain. We hurried up to the Schönbühl hut with a following breeze.

The ridge for all the evening stayed black above us. Looks as black surrounded our next-morning start; because our exit recalled from bed and into action several indignant tourists, whom their faint-hearted guides thought to have just shepherded safely back into unwilling sleep. The glacier thrummed us into accord, a footing hard as steel. The ridge ran heavenward with our feet. For once desire and performance kept step and time. Singly we followed up the long lilting edge of snow. The rock sentinels above seemed to be passing us from hand to hand. Upon the sloping, snow-covered galleries of the upper face we put on the rope in pairs. When we traversed back on to the resumption of the higher ridge, we coiled up the ropes again; but we continued to climb in the same pairs. And upon this glorious and last uprightness of ridge, stately with ice, slashed with black rock and silken with wind-pleated snow, Josef and I had to use all our craft to keep our lead of the younger twain, of whom one was still in his first season and making only his second big alpine climb.

I believe it was the only ascent of the Z'Mutt ridge that year, and one of the few of the peak. The rest of the mountain was in evil condition; and even our edge I should have thought neither black nor blameless in a better year. As it was we were fortunate to have reached the top in under six hours from the hut. For two minutes we were free to stand, and, under trailings of a wide brown cloud, watch with the Matterhorn



EVENING CLOUD

the darkening of its kingdoms of sky and mountain hope. And then the cloud wings closed round us.

As we descended at best speed gusty chacks of snow swirled up to meet us. A heavier snow began to fall over and beyond the ranges; and gradually, and as transparently as breath dims a clear mirror, all Zermatt and its valley grew fainter under our eyes, and faded out upon snowfall. A long way down we met several parties still ascending. They had been enticed by our break of sunshine into too late an ascent, and we heard later that the majority of them were benighted in storm upon the mountain.

Zermatt was closed for climbing. With a day or two still to spare we journeyed round to Chamonix. The Aiguilles were all in white mourning for the season. But we were not surprised, nor disappointed. Theirs are shapes which we did not need to climb to enjoy: among which a mountaineer at rest may read his pleasure from line and mass and shadow and atmosphere as surely as a musician can read harmony from a score without help from hand or ear. And Herford—who fell in the Salient while this story was being first written—had in him an exceptional measure of this understanding. He was a great and an enthusiastic mountain-climber, but his climbing was only incidental. Mountains were the liveliest force in his consciousness, and he shared much of their character. To be with him was to feel the sense of open valley spaces, of clear lines of mounting cliff, and of the sunlit and silent view from a friendly summit.

Our last day we spent on the lake of Geneva, bathing out of a sailing-boat under a hot July sun. In the evening we dined on a terrace overlooking the lake, with the glint of the lights reflecting upon its uneasy shadow. We talked mountains as I shall never talk them again, and I remember saying at the end—'Well, our excitements for this year are over: now for winter and the normal round of work.' All the time over the Jura to the north a long range of sable cloud was mounting against the stars. And we speculated if this might be an unusual shadow of night or some great on-coming storm. In either case it could have no significance for us.

Three days later the storm had broken; and I was out from home again to meet it. When I thought of the mountains, it was only to wonder whether I should discover at last that the sensations I had found among them were only the pretence, the self-deceptions contrived to make an adventure out of quiet

living, which the world was accustomed to pronounce them; and that the battle thrill, the imminence of danger less calculable, was—as it was claimed—the real thing. It took but a few months of the fitful fevers and long fears of war to answer that question for me decisively and for always. Those monotonous reactions of the spirit to unnatural violence and dangerous ugliness—how could anyone who had lived through even a week of destruction in Ypres and a day of action and sight upon the Matterhorn continue to compare their jangling monochord of death with the deep resonant chords of life with which our every sense responded to “the chief things of the ancient mountains and the precious things of the lasting hills.” The breath of the mountains is life-giving and humane. Their very perils are incitements to hardihood, to sincerity and to self-discovery. Even to those of us to whom they have brought death the mountains have first given a just appreciation of life, and the knowledge of a right way of living in which the probability of death could count for but little among many higher values.

Every record of mountaineering, or of active doings, must end upon a note of incompleteness. The adventure—and it is the test of a good adventure—goes on, the same for every generation. It can lose nothing by time or repetition. The first sight of the sea, of the desert, of an elephant or of a mountain remains the first sight for each new child, and evokes afresh the same response. The passion for discovery, for the mastery of unknown difficulty, stays always the same, although every mile of ocean may have been charted and every hill climbed. But the man falls out by the way. He must stand aside, and watch the star he had seen as his own travel on without him; and the torch which he had kindled and rekindled at its hope he must hand on or let fall.

Happily for most of us the desire for action diminishes with our energy. If our adventure has been a good one, of the kind that lasts, and we have followed it undazzled by the sparks of our own achievement, we shall be more occupied with the thought of the persistence of the star than with regret at the surrender of our own torch. Not less than our pleasure in caring for something greatly, is our pleasure in knowing that others will continue to care for the same thing as greatly, and in the same way.

Mountains are a good adventure. They change little enough,

in their attributes or in their charm, for us to consider them permanent. To their changelessness they owe the power of 'renewing our youth' whenever we are again among them. The same appearance, the same atmosphere, reproduce always the same feeling in us. We return at each sight of them to the self which first saw them, regardless of any changes in ourselves. To this, too, they owe their comfortableness, their power, when we are among them, of making us see all other events of life in their right proportion. In great sorrow we do not ask from our friends superficial sympathy. Compassion or agitation do not consort with friendship. For the deeper emotions there are no corresponding or adequate gestures. What we seek in our friends is stability, the assurance which their constancy gives us that neither loss nor our failures have changed any essential in at least one familiar relationship. Of the hills, our friends, we do not expect that they should skip like young rams whenever our humour pipes, or dissolve for our mood into their tears of usual rain. It is upon their changelessness that we rely to give us back ourselves. That which is unalterable in them answers to that which remains unaltered in us, and restores it to its importance for us.

When after seven years I went back to the Alps, it was with hesitation. Our parting having come not entirely in the course of nature, there might be loose or broken ends of former ties still lying ready to trip memory into needless disturbance. Nothing of the kind. As I tramped up to Belalp, the region of happiest early memories, summit after summit, familiar and beautiful, appeared just where it should, in composure, in friendly sameness, refreshing its image upon memory with considerate reserve. A chalet had been built here, a path bettered there, there was less snow above the glacier than the season warranted. But regretful? or painful?—surrounded by the tranquillity of these old friends, still unalterably young, I had only to light a pipe, put my feet up, metaphorically, against the mantelpiece, and speed fancy confidently adrift for the first time since I had seen them last. I can only compare the experience to that of turning in at the gate of a home avenue after a calamitous cycle-ride. There was the same sense of shelter from the mischances of the road and from the condolences of passers-by, the same relief among home-like and unnoticed details, the same restful sureness of a welcome, to come nearer or to stay where I was—upon the old uncompromising terms.

But of more importance than its contribution to our per-

sonal comfort is the feeling of community, with the past and with the future, which this consistency of the mountains can give to those who delight in them. As our generations follow among the hills we have not to explain to one another our affection for them, as we sometimes feel impelled to do in the case of our human admirations—"Ah, but if you'd only known him as he was when we first met!" We know that every past, or future, mountaineer must have cared, and must still be caring, not only for the same mountains, but for the same mountains as they were when we first knew them; and that they must therefore have always appreciated, and be still appreciating them, in the same spirit and for the same reasons as ourselves. And this promise of the continuance of a relationship which we feel to be better than ourselves, as I have suggested before, even more than the prospect of any personal survival, satisfies one of the strongest desires of our nature. The note of the hills is constancy: and the star over their good adventure is hope. We are not, as individual mountaineers, much concerned with what may happen to the torch of our own enterprise; because the fire of its hope for ourselves was borrowed from the star, and it returns to the light of the star—in hope for the future.

No mountaineer who respects common sense and mistrusts sentimentality will claim for mountain climbing that it is more, primarily, than a great sport—if perhaps the greatest. It is a high enough claim. In our unromantic age we use even the term 'sporting' to describe all that would once have been called chivalrous, and later gentlemanly. We interpret the word as applying not more to the doing than to the spirit in which it is done. I am not, accordingly, breaking the bounds of our common sense, or trying to put into these alpine memories something that does not belong to them or that was untrue of them at the time of their experience, if they should seem to represent me as classing myself with those who have found in our mountain sport somewhat more than a holiday exercise or a trapeze for the exhibition of their own bounceability, more even than the stimulus and discipline of an adventure.

We are ourselves expressions of many inherited instincts and impulses, which we can direct, but which we can neither initiate nor put an end to. Mountains, similarly, exemplify less animatedly natural forces and durable laws of order, beauty and power. It is not difficult to understand that between our complex selves and the hills of our choice a relationship will

be established which cannot avoid being complicated rather than simple. It will, necessarily, not continue to be limited to our surface contacts with them, to the pride of the eye, the in-take of the bracing air, and the exhilarating touch of our toes and fingers. We are as likely to become conscious of our sympathy with the mountains we frequent upon another plane, of more inward sensation: that which belongs to the group of less definable but not less vital instincts or emotions forming equally part of our personality. If we cannot at present so much as account for the impulse which takes some of us to the hills, for the will that directs our climbing of them, or for the nature of the merely æsthetic pleasure they give us, much less can we hope to analyse the relationship called into being by the meeting of characteristics in ourselves, and in them, even less within our ken or control. It is enough for us that there is the correspondence upon both planes, to be turned to account or neglected as we choose.

We cannot as mountaineers remain unconscious that both of these aspects of the relationship exist. According to our temperament, however, we shall insist more to ourselves—and all of us more at one time than at another—either upon the surface sympathies first revealed to us, the views, the excitement and the healthy effort of climbing, or upon the underlying exchanges which were more slowly realized. The only difference between one and another of us will appear in the emphasis which, in telling our story, we may or may not be bold to give to this second and more intimate group of impressions:

We see their images in nature's glass
the river jewels, the laughter of the grass,
shadows of their own truth—that gleam and pass.

Even as semblances our dear delight,
'tis but the faintness of our inward sight
turns from their truth, shuns that last vision of height.¹

To tell the whole truth about our mountaineering is indeed not made more easy by the fact that the value for a man of his every adventure depends as much upon what he may himself bring to it, of his own nature, as upon what the incidents or impressions of the unknown into which he is venturing may contribute. There is nothing of permanent value for our lives to be found ready-made and reach-me-down in mountain-climbing, any more than in our other avocations or lasting

¹ *Il Paradiso* : XXX. 76.

pursuits. Any real interest or pursuit, if it is to survive its first novelty, must be built into a framework ; and the building of this must proceed from both sides, no less from inside ourselves than from the suggestion and the material such as any rugged hill affords.

The many will continue to go to the mountains for their obvious opportunity, as an exercise-ground for energy and enterprise. But, even so, their interest will be only occasional, or transitory, unless they are prepared to make of their mountaineering something of a structure, a systematized and whim-proof gymnasium let us say, contributing to the fabric their own technique and self-discipline conformably with the mountain contribution of apparatus and instruction. This is the easier, as it is the more obvious, structure.

A few of us may discover, in the course of our climbing, that mountains are as rich in material for a joint erection of another kind, call it a temple or, it may be, a philosopher's porch. Our number will be less, but our opportunity is even greater ; and it will be free from the physical restrictions which must always safeguard our purely climbing activities. For the contribution which mountains can make towards this our later purpose has no limitation as yet known : save that they would appear to double all that we on our side can find to offer from time to time. The more we understand, imaginatively, of the ideas for which mountains stand as the greatest natural symbols, the more will they inspire and enlarge our design. The more we learn among them, by experience or observation, the more they can guide us in shaping the material we add to theirs. And we may take from them, when the time comes for memory and reflection, a perfected home for our thoughts more generous, more liberal even than their own great spaces of air and height and freedom.

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